THE VELVET MASK

AND OTHER STORIES

By

LEONARD GRIBBLE

W. H. ALLEN
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Velvet Mask	5
Eye For An Eye	15
The Scarlet Scarf	25
The Barb Of Death	35
Murder At Moon Farm	47
They Came To Kill	57
The Bogus Artist	67
The Kidnapped Film Star	77
Mr. Burgoyne's Octopus	87
The Lost Tunes	97
The Spiked Gunn	107
The Batley Inheritance	119

THE VELVET MASK

THE STRIKINGLY pretty and *chic* young woman gowned by Schiaparelli smiled enchantingly at the Customs official as he chalked green hieroglyphics on her travelling-cases, and turned daintily in the wake of a grinning porter. A few minutes later she was seated in a first-class window-seat of the waiting London train. She gave her attention to a book.

She did not observe the interested stare of a bullet-headed man in sober grey clothes and bowler. A matter of normal routine had brought Sergeant Clinton of Scotland Yard's Department X2 to Dover that afternoon, and he was returning by the boat-train. Clinton, however, travelled second-class. He paused by the window of the first-class compartment, scanned the rather exotic jacket of the book the woman was reading, and frowned.

Before the train left Dover Clinton had called up his chief, Superintendent Anthony Slade, who lost no time in approaching the Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the C.I.D.

"Clinton saw Vera de Vez on the boat-train," he told the A.C. "It looks as though we're going to get our hands on Mr. Cedric Spender after all."

The A.C. raised arched brows.

"Vera, eh?" he mused. The name conjured visions of a cosmopolitan adventuress whose slick technique had left the police of half a dozen countries baffled. "She always had a weakness for Cedric, didn't she, Slade?"

"Yes, weakness explains it... in a way," smiled Slade.

The A.C. nodded.

"Now he's in a jam, hiding low, and daren't let us find him because he knows that circumstantial evidence will pin the Galston robbery on him... she arrives to the rescue, probably from the other side of Europe. Our undeserving Cedric is a lucky man, Slade."

This time the chief of Department X2 did not smile. He said grimly, "There is also the Duchess of Brinley's ball, sir. That should interest both Cedric—and Vera."

The A.C. grunted.

"True," he murmured. "You think they can gain admission, even if we send a warning?"

"Vera de Vez can gain admission anywhere," said Slade. He spoke with knowledge. "And she is a business woman; she knows instinctively the right side of a bargain. That's why she has never made the mistake of marrying Cedric Spender."

The A.C. laughed.

"You're probably right, Slade All right, I'll leave them to your tender mercies. But Spender must not leave the country—nor Vera, if she becomes tangled in anything. And I shall expect you to take all reasonable precautions."

"Very good, sir," said Slade.

Anthony Slade was in his office when Sergeant Clinton, glum-faced, frowning, arrived, nearly three hours later.

"I lost her," mourned the sergeant. "Hadn't a chance. She doubled back on her trail three times after leaving Victoria, and then a traffic hold-up beat me."

"Tough luck," Slade agreed, "but it shows us one thing, Clinton. She's here on business. She's leading no one to Spender."

"You think they'll be on a job together?"

Interest flickered in Clinton's normally unexpressive eyes.

"The Duchess of Brinley's ball is the zenith of the London season, Clinton. There'll be tens of thousands of pounds' worth of jewels on parade that night... and, remember, until midnight—masks!" Slade paused for a moment. "We've got the job."

Clinton groaned.

"I hate those fancy-dress affairs. I'd sooner do eight hours on the pavement."

Slade grinned.

"You may get your wish if Cedric Spender gets away with another job and out of the country. It looks as though, while the orchestra's playing, we've got to lead someone a merry dance."

"Spender?"

"Or Vera. I believe she's a wonderful dancing partner, Clinton."

The sergeant groaned again.

"That's what I'm afraid of: she may do the lead in this merry dance."

About the same time that this piece of conversation was unfolding, two people sat in a back-room apartment of a small hotel in Clapham The man paced the floor, the woman sat in a chair of very worn upholstery, lazily smoking a cigarette.

"It is dangerous," the man repeated. "Madness!"

"My dear Cedric"—the woman tapped ash from her sepia tinted cigarette—"it would be flying in the face of Providence to pass up this opportunity. That's what Providence is for—to provide. Well it's provided us with something sweet this time, a masked ball.. and the pickings. . my dear Cedric, the pickings! Let your imagination play for a moment, not work—just play."

Her laugh tinkled. There was something about her slight foreign accent that intrigued the ear. For a moment the man eyed her hungrily, then he shrugged.

"Vera, you are beyond belief. You come to the rescue; that is splendid of you——"

"The fourth rescue, I believe, Cedric"

"Perhaps. I do not count such . episodes. But you come, as I say, to the rescue, and what do you propose? You propose to play right into the hands of the police. And why, because you cannot refuse the thought of taking a necklace of emeralds or sapphires."

She frowned.

"You forget, Cedric, your own inability to refuse taking bonds from a safe four weeks ago."

"That was business. No pleasure, I assure you, in robbing a safe——"

"Listen, my friend. This will be a business trip for me, only a business trip. I will explain. The Baron de Granditte is in this country, with his Baroness, that slut who caused me to be—— But never mind. I have a debt to repay, and it shall be repaid by the Baroness."

"How?"

Cedric Spender was intrigued.

"She has a necklace of exquisite pearls."

"True, the Granditte pearls are famous the world over.

Vera de Vez smiled.

"Yet the Granditte have lost much money recently."

Spender frowned. "This is beyond me. I cannot hope to follow you, Vera. What are you trying to tell me?"

"A suspicion I have. Cedric, *mon ami*, I suspect that the Granditte pearls are—fakes!"

"Impossible!"

She smiled with tolerance.

"So you and the world at large would declare. But how have the Granditte procured ready money? Why this new opulence and this new vogue of travelling? Perhaps a famous necklace was sold—quietly; and perhaps a clever fake replaced it." The speaker's mouth drew taut. "Cedric, I would risk anything to make that smug Carlotta de Granditte lose face, show her up as a cheap social imposter with paste jewellery . . . anything."

"But the risk," he protested weakly, "the police."

"I said *anything*, Cedric. Give me another cigarette, *mon ami*."

The Duchess of Brinley's masked ball was an affair conducted with almost Continental lavishness. Once a year it was an institution heralded with delight by all who could claim by birth or friendship a card of invitation. It was a gorgeous function, held in the London house of the Brinley family, with its wide, high rooms, its terraces, and fairy-lit lawns. On the day before the ball Slade told his sergeant which costume the two detectives would wear.

"Franciscan friars, Clinton. That costume will enable us to conceal firearms, and it is one that can be shed quickly."

"It'll be hot," Clinton pointed out.

"Do you anticipate dancing that amount?"

Clinton grunted.

Slade shuffled some sheets of paper spread across his desk.

"I'm interested in that book she was reading, Clinton. Remember?"

"You mean that Diane something or other?"

"Yes, *Diane de Poitiers.* Know anything about the lady, Clinton?"

"No."

"For a family man, that's just as well. But I'll tell you this much. She was a very personable lady—if one can call her a lady, even at this late date. She lived four or five hundred years ago, was the mistress of Henry the Second of France, and she had her own way far too much, as many a poor Huguenot would have told you."

Clinton merely blinked.

Slade picked up one of the sheets of paper.

"Here is a list of the invited guests to the Brinley ball." He ran a finger down the column of names. "And included is the name of a descendant of one of the oldest Huguenot families.'

"I know that one," put in Clinton. "Read it in the *Daily Newsreel.* The Baron de Granditte."

Slade nodded.

"Right, the Baron de Granditte. Now, Clinton, if there is one thing besides a clever rascality possessed by the fair Vera, it is a sense of irony. Almost every police force in Europe has reason to agree on that point. It is reasonable, then, to expect some show of irony in this matter of the Brinley ball. And I cannot imagine a greater display than the victimizing, say, of the Huguenot de Granditte by Diane de Poitiers. It might be a page torn from history."

Clinton stared, frankly incredulous. He was accustomed to Slade's methods of reasoning, but this flight baffled him.

"You think, then, that she will be at the ball as this Diane person?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," said Slade. "But it also gives a clue to Cedric Spender. We must look for a Henry the Second."

Clinton gulped.

"But——"

"Exactly," Slade nodded. "I know. How can I be sure? I can't. But think, for a moment, of the chain of circum-

stances. The book you saw her reading, engrossed in. That character would appeal to her. The Granditte will be at the ball with the celebrated Granditte pearls, which date from the time of Henry of Navarre. And—mark this, Clinton—the Sûreté *dossier* on Vera records that nine years ago, at the instruction of the Baroness de Granditte, she was arrested as an undesirable inhabitant of the streets of Granditte. I don't think, from what I know of her, that Vera de Vez has a forgiving type of mind."

Clinton grinned.

"You make it sound easy," he said. "Still, she has to get inside... with Spender."

"Not a difficult problem for Vera, Clinton. A forged invitation card, or one that has been stolen, a giggle about losing it... no, not very difficult for an accomplished actress."

Slade was right. Vera de Vez, a velvet domino mask concealing her eyes and the top part of her face, smiled her way past the servitor receiving cards. Announced as Sir Edward and Lady Chillingley, she and her companion, who was likewise masked, were swept into the assemblage of chattering guests. Courtiers rubbed shoulders with street-urchins; Nell Gwynns curtseyed to Red Indians and buccaneers from the Spanish Main; Swiss goat-girls and Dutch canal-girls hung on the arms of sailormen and Knights Templar; Pierrettes dimpled before Punchinellos.

Few paid more than a scant glance to the couple of Franciscan friars who threaded their way through the throng, and it is safe to assert that no one intercepted the glance of understanding that passed between the brown-robed brothers when one caught sight of a dainty figure of lace and velvet with a silver arrow pinned to her corsage.

Anthony Slade had found Diane the Huntress. A whispered word to Clinton, and the Yard men parted. Nearly an hour passed before Slade decided who was Henry the Second of France in that motley gathering. Henry stood mostly apart, sipping a drink, but once Diane de Poitiers drifted near, on the arm of a gallant from Alva's army, and the watchful Slade saw the sliver of paper change hands. Three minutes later the message was a scrap of black ash floating into the cool night air. Only when it had disappeared did the lolling Henry the Second move away.

Clinton drifted after him.

The lights were lowered for a rainbow dance. As the

horde of dancers took the floor, a rain of coloured lights fell over their shoulders. Slade tried to pick out Vera, but she eluded him. Like a clever general, baulked in one manoeuvre, he adopted a strategic position. He waited behind the palms at the entrance to the garden. To make contact with Henry the Second the Huntress would have to pass that way. He was in that position when something small and round was jabbed against his spine.

"Come quietly, Mr. Busy," said a thin voice.

Then Slade knew that he had not fully gauged the cleverness of the pair of rogues against whom he was pitted.

"Keep your hands stiff at your sides."

Slade walked whither he was prodded, through the garden, aflame with scores of dangling fairy-lanterns, towards a potting-shed. The door was thrust open, and the thin voice said, "Get in."

Slade was desperate. Where was Clinton? Why had——

"I said get in," the voice rasped.

Slade took a step forward into the blackness of the shed, and spun on his heel.

Jumping under the other's guard, he whisked the flaring skirts of his friar's frock about the other's legs. The man was taken completely by surprise. As he pressed the trigger of his gun, his aim was inches wide of Slade's heart. The bullet tore through the thick woollen material, slightly nicking the detective's left arm. Then Slade's right contacted with the point of the other's chin, and out into the garden sprawled the velvet and silk-clad figure of Henry the Second.

Slade picked up the gun, fitted with a silencer, and dragged the inert body of the second Henry of France into the cool dampness of the potting-shed. Closing the door, he drew a pencil flashlight from his concealed pocket, and switched it on. Lying in a huddled heap, bound and gagged was Clinton.

Slade grinned wryly.

Yes, they had been far more clever than he had allowed. He untied his assistant, and while Clinton was slowly recovering consciousness from a heavy blow on the scalp, Slade undressed Henry the Second. Below the pale gleam of his torch-ray the still features of Cedric Spender stared back at him.

When Spender sat up Slade was garbed in the silks and

velvets he had taken from the man he had felled. Spender scowled as Slade slipped a pair of handcuffs over his wrists.

"Better get into that friar's garb, Spender," the Yard man advised. "You're not exactly presentable in those underclothes."

Spender swore.

"You haven't got away with this yet," he growled.

Slade raised his brows.

"No? We'll see. Clinton, take this gun, and if he tries any more strong-arm stuff——"

"He won't," promised the sergeant, with his left hand feeling tenderly at the rising bump on his head.

Slade passed outside.

Down a deserted garden path he lingered. Bright lights gleamed from the house, and he knew that the rainbow dance was over. He wondered whether the Baroness de Granditte had yet discovered the loss of her famous pearls. He could not afford to go back and risk missing the dainty Diane de Poitiers. With the pearls, and Vera, and with Cedric Spender in the potting-shed, the Yard had made a good haul that night. There would be recovery of the bonds stolen by Spender. They had not been negotiated as yet...

He stiffened.

Wide skirts rustled against a shrub and light footsteps pattered along the path towards him.

Hastily he adjusted the mask he had taken from the prone Henry the Second.

Diane de Poitiers appeared, the silver arrow winking in the orange glow of the swinging lanterns.

"Quick, Cedric—here."

A rope of something knotted and tinkling slightly was thrust into his hand. In the dusk her breath fanned his cheek. She was very close, and he was aware of a rich perfume.

"Now," she murmured, trotting ahead.

Under the velvet mask she wore her chin was a pale blue. He followed. She led the way through a gate in the wall, ran down a street, and crossed to a parked car.

"Quick, Cedric."

He clambered in after her. The starter whirred, and the car glided quietly away from the kerb. Slade sat still, the pearls in a pocket of his too tightly-fitting costume.

Whither was she taking him? He resolved to be patient and discover. Perhaps... the bonds...

The car fled along street after street, finally stopping before a house in a quiet backwater thoroughfare at the back of Holland Park Road.

"Wait, *mon ami*," she murmured, and slipped from behind the wheel. "I will get the bags."

She ran up the steps, opened the door with a latch-key, and disappeared inside. Slade glanced at the dashboard. The next moment he sprang up those worn stone steps in pursuit. From the belt around his waist he took a bunch of keys with small wards. A matter of seconds only, and the lock clicked back. He sprang for the stairs, for a light gleamed along a landing. His felt slippers, as worn by France's second Henry, were noiseless. He reached the door through which light streamed. At a desk, writing quickly, sat Vera de Vez, the velvet mask taken from her face.

As Slade entered she started, grabbed at her handbag, but the detective was too quick for her.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, mademoiselle," he said, "but it seems we both gave ourselves away."

She shrugged.

"Too bad. Another three minutes and I should have been away in the car in the rear garage."

"With the bonds, of course."

"Of course."

"But the pearls. Would you leave them with me?"

"Certainly. I must have my revenge."

Failing to understand, Slade took the rope of pearls from his doublet pocket. In the light of the electric globe he made a discovery that surprised him.

"Imitation!"

"But of course!" she mocked. "My revenge would be when the world knew. You have tricked me, but you cannot rob me of that."

"Again I have to disappoint you, mademoiselle. These will be returned to the Baroness... quietly."

For a moment she appeared stunned. Then she shrugged.

"Very well, you win. But you did not deceive me. You

did up all the buttons of your doublet. Cedric purposely left the top one unfastened."

"Clever," nodded Slade. "But you too made a mistake, mademoiselle. You shouldn't have taken the key of the car. That left me suspicious."

"Yes," she admitted. "That was foolish. I will remember—next time."

She picked up the velvet mask, and as she did so her fingers fumbled, and a ring slipped from one of her hands. She raised the mask quickly, the elastic band stretched taut as a catapult. Suddenly she released it, and the ring smashed against the light bulb. In the moment before darkness descended Slade grabbed her handbag. Too late, she snatched at where it had been.

In the darkness Slade spoke.

"I am afraid, mademoiselle, it really will have to be that next time.'"

She swore luridly in the *argot* of the Paris streets.

EYE FOR AN EYE

IT APPEARS to be an axiom of the world of journalism that a gaol-break makes the front page, whether the prisoner who escapes is John Dillinger in the United States or Patch Mortley in England. Dillinger's escape made the front pages of the world's Press; so did Mortley's when six weeks had passed without his recapture Mortley, said the newspapers, was the first man to beat the Dartmoor tradition, and that made him front-page news.

It also made him a source of acute anxiety to three people, one a Scotland Yard detective, the others a man and woman, trapeze performers in a circus show.

After a month had passed, and no re-arrest had been made, Superintendent Anthony Slade of the Criminal Investigation Department (X2), New Scotland Yard, was delegated to the job of finding Mortley.

"With a face like his," an irate A.C. told Slade. "he can't hide for long. Every newspaper reader in the country knows what he looks like. A scarred cheek and one eye missing—why, the man would stand out in a crowd."

Which was precisely what Slade himself thought as he studied the missing man's *dossier*. Mortley had been one of a trio of trapeze artists, known as the Flying Demons. The other members of the troupe were George Denman and Vyra Lake. Perhaps it was the inevitable that happened: both men fell in love with the woman. There was a fight—not a very serious affair, from what Slade gathered—but Denman accused the other man of trying to murder him. The woman had sided with Denman, and Mortley had gone to the Devon moors for five years.

That was three and a half years before.

Mortley had never resigned himself, to prison life. Bitterly resentful, vowing that he would exact a terrible payment from the man and woman who had conspired to wrong him, he had been marked as dangerous by the warders Perhaps that explains the haste with which a warder, approached by the prisoner in threatening mood, let off his carbine. Defensive action was supplied as an explanation at the subsequent hearing, and the explanation was officially accepted. Meantime Mortley lay in hospital, adding fresh fuel to the fire of his hate each time he reflected that henceforth he would have an empty socket instead of a left eye.

When he left the hospital and returned to the gangs on the moors he was dubbed "Patch." The name stuck. Three years later had come his spectacular and successful break for freedom.

It was nearly two months after his escape from Dartmoor —after he himself had put in a month of solid hard routine work on the case—that Slade first received news of the escaped convict. The cashier of the bank in which Mortley had an outstanding credit of several hundred pounds informed the police that a man had called at the bank and presented a cheque made out to bearer for five hundred pounds—almost the total sum remaining to Mortley's credit —and endorsed with Philip Mortley's unmistakable signature. The cashier had had no recourse but to honour the cheque.

Slade journeyed to the West of England and interviewed the cashier, who was very blunt and very self-assured. The man who had presented the cheque was not Philip Mortley. He had no scar on his cheek, and he had two eyes. Besides, added the cashier, who had known the trapeze artist before his trial, this man had a differently shaped face, not even the same shaped nose.

This was a rude setback to Slade. It either meant that Patch Mortley had friends, or that he had taken a desperate expedient to secure five hundred pounds.

It was the five hundred pounds that set Slade thinking along a definite line. The sum was a round figure, suggestive of a fee. A fee for what? Fingering his chin while he asked himself the question, he found the answer.

A plastic surgeon!

He made inquiries in Harley Street, and learned that for that sum a man could have his face completely made over, with facial muscles dragged into different positions, line of mouth changed, ears altered, nose reshaped.

He had barely assimilated the truth that he might not be looking for Patch Mortley, but for a man whose face was entirely strange to him, a man he could meet in the street and never realize was his quarry, when he received the second piece of news. This was a visit from George Denman. The man, Slade saw, was on the verge of nervous prostration; behind the false brightness of his eyes lurked the shadow of a fear. He told the Yard man that after Mortley's conviction he had married Vyra Lake, and they had travelled the country in an act of their own invention, called the Leap of Death. For three years they had run their aerial acrobatics act with varying success, and were

now under contract to do the Leap of Death for Salter's Circus.

Three days before the circus had arrived in Brighton, and on the following day a letter had arrived for the Denmans.

Slade read the note. It was a threat:

"An eye for an eye. Don't think you can escape me or that anything on this earth can stop me obtaining my just revenge. I shall come when I am ready."

The note was written in a slanting scrawl and unsigned.

"You recognize the handwriting?" asked the detective.

"It's Mortley's," replied the trembling man. "He's after me. He'll kill me and Vyra, both of us. I know. He swore he would before he left the dock."

"Where's the envelope?"

Denman produced it. The postmark revealed that the letter had been posted at 6.30 p.m. in South-west London.

"I and my wife want police protection, Superintendent," said Denman. "Our lives aren't safe while Mortley's at large."

"You'll get protection," promised Slade, and was as good as his word.

The same day he journeyed to Brighton, with his right-hand assistant, Sergeant Clinton, dour, bullet-headed, as efficient as a pair of freshly-ground scissors. In the large marquee the two Yard men held a conference with the proprietor, James Salter, a burly man in a check suit with a horseshoe tie-pin.

Salter was inclined to hedge.

"I don't like it, Superintendent. It's not going to do me a lot of good, having the police about the place."

"The public won't know," Slade pointed out.

"The public always knows," asserted the man who had had daily dealings with it for forty-five years. "These things get out. You can't stop 'em."

"It'll cost you a tidy sum to break the Denmans' contract."

Slade tried a fresh tack. The bluntness of the assertion caused the circus owner to wince.

"Well, suppose I did keep 'em"—he weakened visibly—"what have you got to suggest? I don't want no murderer in my audience." His waistcoat buttons oscillated at the thought. He leaned closer to Slade. "And I don't want no murders," he added, jabbing the air with a forefinger.

From which it may be gathered that Mr. Salter was not altogether enthusiastic when Slade propounded a plan. This plan was partly the result of a survey of the circus owner's properties and partly the product of the Yard detective's deciding that his theory must be the right one—namely, Philip Mortley was a man with a new face.

He put himself in Mortley's place and tried to gauge the man's reactions. He was violent, determined, and desperate; and he was a man with one tremendous asset. No one knew him.

To keep his word, he would have to come to Brighton, where the Denmans were under police protection at their hotel and at the circus. The only time when the Denmans were not accompanied by a plain-clothes man was when they were performing their act. Slade argued that Mortley's one chance of killing either or both would be while their act was being performed.

From that assumption as a starting-point, he prepared his plan. Entrance to the rear of the marquee was possible from two sides: one, a small compartment of wood where an electrician controlled the lights; the other, an enclosed canvas corridor leading from the space provided for serving refreshments to the performers' dressing-rooms. Sergeant Clinton became an attendant at the refreshment-counter; Slade himself became the electrician's understudy. Nightly, while Clinton watched from the far side of the great tent, he took over the lighting controls just before the Leap of Death was performed—and waited. Nightly both Yard men were disappointed.

Three weeks went by, the Yard men taking up their positions each night at the appointed time, and as night succeeded night without the appearance of Patch Mortley, the proprietor lost the harassed frown which had marked his face during the first week, and the Denmans lost some of their nervous fear.

"That Mortley's funking it—lost his nerve," Salter confided to Slade one evening when the audience had dispersed and their guards had started with the Denmans to their hotel. "He's not putting his head in a noose just because he's got a grudge."

Slade didn't agree, and the next day Salter was in panic. A note arrived for the Denmans, which read:

"An eye for an eye. Tonight I shall repay my debt. Plain-clothes detectives won't save you."

Again the sender omitted to sign or date his missive. George Denman wanted to put off the Leap of Death performance for that evening, but Salter swore and argued and was adamant. The act was a great attraction, and the circus was in Brighton for a whole season. He had sold hundreds of seats, and he couldn't turn down the public. He never had yet; he wasn't going to now.

Vyra Denman had a weeping fit, and went to see Slade.

"Oh, Superintendent," she sobbed, "can't you do something? It's horrible, thinking he's coming here tonight—to——"

She had shuddered and wept.

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Denman," Slade assured her. "One thing I can promise. Mortley shall neither shoot you nor stab you." He smiled tightly. "I'm afraid it remains with you to make sure that he does not poison you."

The woman went away, little comforted. Her husband sat in the marquee, drinking heavily until Salter took him by the collar and, despite his protests, dipped his head in a trough. Salter went through the day like a man in a daze. By evening his temper was worn ragged. Word had seeped through the crowd of circus employees that something was afoot. No one knew what, and everyone speculated.

By one of those strange cycles of circumstance which govern the affairs of men and things of a material world, that night was wet, and a larger crowd than usual packed the great marquee, with its towering apex, its huge arena, and its tiers of floodlights. Holiday-makers stood jam-packed in gangways; every available seat was filled, and late-comers had to be turned away.

Slade, watching the crowd through a sliding-panel in the electrician's compartment, noted the sea of expectant faces, heard the clapping as the brightly-uniformed orchestra struck up a rousing Sousa march and the performance for the evening opened. In a short while the vast arena on which he gazed resounded to the roars of laughter raised by the antics of a couple of clowns. He saw the jugglers follow the performing seals, the dainty equestrienne whip her ponies into intelligent activity, to be followed in turn by a team of clever tumblers.

He turned away from the opening and shut the panel. The successive rounds of applause had left him fidgety. He told himself this was due to the long wait. It was—a wait of more than three watchful weeks. His responsibility was great. If he tripped up...

He cast the thought from him, lit his pipe, and went over each separate detail of his plan for the twentieth time. He was opposed, he was convinced, to a man with an unknown face; and a man who changed his face would not omit to have his finger-tips regrafted with skin. There was only one satisfactory solution, to Slade's mind. Patch Mortley would have to give himself away.

Around that belief was raised the superstructure of Slade's plan. It was bold, it was risky, but with average luck it would produce the result Slade was out to get.

At the appointed time the electrician got up from his chair and nodded abruptly. "Just as before," he told Slade as the Yard man took his place, and went out.

The words struck Slade as ironic. He glanced at his watch, and then took something round from his waistcoat pocket. Clinton would be doing the same thing at that moment. He kept that round object in his left hand.

He leaned forward and pulled down a switch. Seconds later the plaudits that heralded the appearance of the actors in the Leap of Death reached him as a muffled undertone. He asked himself, would he—or Clinton—receive the visit? Would...

As the applause died the door creaked open. In the entrance stood a masked man, holding a blue-black automatic. His overcoat was dark grey, his low-pulled felt hat black.

"Hi," said Slade, rising and keeping to his adopted *role*, "you can't come——"

"Stand still," said the masked man.

His voice was muffled, his head sunk low between his shoulders, so that it was difficult to assess his true height. He took a step towards the other side of the compartment.

"Hey, wait a minute," said Slade. "What the hell d'you think you're——"

"I said stand——"

He did not finish the warning before the watchful detective leaped, ducking to one side. Flame spat from the menacing gun, but the bullet ploughed wide. The next instant the masked intruder and Slade were at grips.

The two men, close-locked, thrashed backwards and forwards across the narrow apartment. A chair toppled over. They grunted, clung. Fists whirled and flayed. Suddenly Slade saw the opening for which he sought. His right fist came out, round, and hooked a vicious jab against the side of the other's head. It was not a blow that would put a man out, but it would rock one's head with pain[illegible]

The masked man swore luridly, and Slade saw his shortened left arm swing back. Too late he tried to duck. That swinging fist caught him between the eyes with cruel precision. Feeling himself rocked off his feet, slipping backwards, his senses reeling, he opened the fingers of his left hand.

He did not lose consciousness completely. Like a man tied, and with his head swathed in dark cloth, Slade, prone on the floor, was aware of the other man searching the floor hurriedly, his hands groping. He tried to rise, but his head seemed to disappear from the remainder of his body. He felt sick.

Then a door slammed, and the sound beat back the threatening oblivion. Slade rose dizzily, to find himself alone. Pulling himself together, he too began searching the floor. Minutes passed and still he searched, hoping against hope. Suddenly he gave a short cry, and picked up something round and cool to the touch. He dropped it in his pocket and sprang after the man who had disappeared. His crêpe-soled shoes made no sound as he hastened to where a steel ladder led aloft to the high roof of the marquee. Above him he saw a black shape, climbing slowly, stealthily.

The masked man...

Slade raised his arms and began that vertical ascent. As his head rose beyond the shadow thrown by a large flange of the tent, he caught his breath. Floodlights tilted upwards burned fiercely upon the white-clad shapes of the Denmans as they drifted in a wide arc, the man gripping a trapeze pole, the woman clutching his ankles. They swung above the multitude below, rhythmically, with a swift, sweeping motion that made one catch one's breath. Not a murmur rose from below. It was as though that vast audience dared not breathe for fear of disturbing the air in which the death-leapers swung.

Slade glanced at the man above him. His hands gripped the side of the steel ladder as he stood a few feet below the level of the acrobats. The detective climbed a few more feet, and paused.

Somewhere down in the orchestra a muffled drum began to beat, slowly, vibratingly. Slade's nerves tightened. It was the moment for the Leap of Death, for that one perilous instant when the man would let go, and, with the woman grasping his legs, carrying him plummet-like to seeming death, would clutch at the pole of a second trapeze, swinging some fifteen feet below the one he now held. The drum-beat quickened; then came a crash on the cymbals.

George Denman opened his hands. Man and woman hurtled downward in eerie silence. Slade watched for the raising of the masked man's gun; but it was not raised. Instead, the masked man spoke.

"An eye for an eye," he said, and the voice rang like a deep-toned bell. "I have kept my word and come. My vengeance is overtaking both of you. Leap to your death!"

The last words rose to a cry.

Slade saw the flying acrobat's arms tremble as those words reached his ears. The woman seemed to drag more heavily at her husband's legs. Then Denman was reaching out for the lower trapeze. His hands touched it, fumbled ... and the trapeze swung drunkenly away—empty!

Slade turned away his head. He heard the scream of women and the cries of men as the bodies crashed to the sawdust of the arena, fifty feet below. Then his pulses raced. From above floated a triumphant cry.

Grimly, icy resolve congealing in his brain, Slade climbed. The man above looked down, saw him, and from his lips broke a savage oath. He raised his gun.

"Philip Mortley," called Slade, "I've come to arrest you for——"

That was as far as he got. At sound of the name the dark figure leaped suddenly outward, away from the ladder-top, to what looked like certain destruction. But his hands found a rope. Like a dark spider, he spun round and round, then slipped downward with amazing agility. It was only then that Slade realized Mortley had at one time been a well-known trapeze artist himself. The man reached the arena before the detective had descended half a dozen rungs. Across the sawdust sprang a bounding figure—Clinton. But the sergeant was too late. The masked man disappeared through a doorway which Slade knew would enable him to reach another, where he could find refuge among the multitude, unless he was prevented.

But he wasn't. Clinton was hopelessly outdistanced.

"Sorry," muttered the sergeant, when Slade stood beside him.

"Nonsense, man," retorted Slade, and his voice was light. It was against some such contingency that he had planned.

While ambulance men removed the broken bodies of the two people who had earned the undying hate of Philip Mortley, Slade and Clinton stood at the entrance, watching and scrutinizing every person that left.

The stream flowed by, chattering, some crying hysterically, others pale-faced and silent. Ten minutes had passed,

and still the people poured out of the large marquee. Men and women threw frightened looks at the grim-faced Yard men, and hurried by, muttering to themselves. Then, suddenly, Clinton caught his chief's eye. Slade nodded. The two Yard men pounced upon a clean-shaven man in a brown overcoat, and wearing a cloth cap.

Slade had never seen the man's face before, but he said with ringing confidence, "You are under arrest, Philip Mortley, on a charge of breaking from Dartmoor Prison and——"

The man tried to shake off the detective's grip.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "This is outrageous! I'll see that something is done——"

His lips moved quickly. His eyes did not move, even when Slade smiled and said, "No use, Mortley, you've cooked your goose this time. It was very clever, but you took too much for granted."

They led their prisoner into one of the dressing-rooms, and there Slade completed his interrupted charge, and added the customary caution. The man braced his shoulders.

"I suppose you have proof of this ridiculous charge?" he inquired sarcastically. "It's going to be hard——"

"I have ample proof, Mortley. Despite your changed face and skin freshly grafted on to your finger-tips. What colour are your eyes?"

The question appeared to startle the man. A hand reached up to his face, but fell away.

"What colour are——? What on earth can that have to do with the—the question?" he blustered.

"Everything," Slade told him. "Answer. I'm getting impatient. What colour are they?"

"Why—why"—the man licked his lips—"grey, of course. I never heard such a preposterous——"

He caught his breath. Slade had taken a mirror from the dressing-table behind him and was holding it forward. Slowly the man took it from the detective and stared at the reflection of his face. At what he saw a strangled cry broke from him.

The glass reflected one grey eye and one brown!

Slade dipped his hand into his pocket and took out a glass eye.

"This is the one you lost, Mortley, when I smacked you round the head. You couldn't go on with a hole in your head; you had to stop and hunt for the lost eye. In your haste and excitement the possibility of there being *two*

glass eyes on the floor did not occur to you. However, there were. You picked up the nearer, the one I dropped as I fell. *That was the brown eye.*"

The prisoner crumpled, his resistance broken. Clinton brought him a chair.

"Hold 'em out, Mortley," Slade commanded.

The man stretched out his wrists, and a pair of handcuffs snapped over them.

"I had to send to Princetown for the measurements of your eye, Mortley," the Yard man informed his prisoner, who stared upward with bewildered gaze. "Luckily the hospital had details, and I was able to have an eye made that would fit your socket. It was an easy guess that you would have a coat you could turn inside out, and it took no effort on your part to throw away your hat and gun and to put on a cap you'd got hidden in a pocket. Yes, Mortley, I think we had your possible moves covered in advance. The only thing I didn't figure on was your killing them the way you did."

At those last words the prisoner lifted his face. A smile broke the lips. Into the one sound eye crept a gleam; a pulse throbbed wildly in the stretched throat.

"You were clever," he said, hissing the words through taut jaws, "but not clever enough. I killed them without murdering them. You can't hang me. I swore I wouldn't hang for them, and you can't do it to me. I'm too clever—far too clever for you."

The words trembled into a gushing laugh that shook his gaunt frame. Colour stained the white smooth skin stretched tightly across his cheek-bones.

Slade and Clinton exchanged glances that were significant. That wild gleam in the man's eye, the equally wild quality of his laughter, told them more eloquently than words that Patch Mortley had indeed spoken the truth. Now that the great crisis of his life had passed—that crisis which for brooding years had been the limit of his mental horizon—his reason had snapped. The sudden release of a great internal pressure had been too much for him.

Patch Mortley, the man who had alike defied tradition and the law and kept his vow, had finally cheated himself. He would not return to Dartmoor; he would end his days in the Broadmoor State Asylum for the criminally insane.

THE SCARLET SCARF

THE GIRL in the doorway paused, scanning the white-topped tables, a-glitter with bright cutlery and glass. It was the Shooting Star's busiest hour—a few minutes past midnight. On the sprung maple floor dancers glided to the strains of a well-played samba. Waiters hovered with the grace of swallows, and passed on. The place was crowded, and above the music and the sound of shuffling feet rose the gay laughter of women.

The girl frowned, conscious that she was conspicuous in her red dress, with the gauzy scarlet scarf encircling her white neck, and draped across one shoulder. Men's glances turned to her. More than one masculine brow arched in appreciation.

Then she saw the person she sought: a young man seated alone at a far table. He was not in dinner jacket or evening dress, and his long white fingers, spread upon the table before him, drummed endlessly. Their drumming ceased as the girl reached his table and sat down.

"Got them?" he whispered, his tone thickened with momentary anxiety.

"Yes," she replied, and she too whispered. "Get me a drink—quick. I need one."

A waiter brought her an iced Manhattan. As she sipped the drink, large brown eyes studied the young man's face. It was a handsome face, with high forehead and laughter creases at side of mouth and eyes.

"I can't go through this again, Jim," she said.

"It's the last time, darling, I swear it!" His white hands knotted. "We get the money and leave the country, and then it's the straight road we take."

She sighed; it might have been with relief.

"That's a promise?"

"It's a promise," he told her gravely.

She took a package from her handbag and passed it across the table. He took it and slipped it in a pocket inside his coat. His hand trembled as he held the package.

"The biggest job I've pulled, sweetheart."

"And your last, Jim."

"My last, Doreen."

He glanced at his watch. "Five minutes before I need go. Shall we dance?"

They danced, and as he held her close and his lips were brushed by stray tendrils of her hair, he murmured, "I love you very much, Doreen. It'll be a new life for us ... after tonight."

In his arms he felt her shiver.

"After tonight," she said softly, as though the words held special meaning for her.

There were tears in her eyes as she watched him leave. She glanced at her watch, saw the minute hand pass through the space of three minutes, and then she followed him.

The Shooting Star was a club whose only entrance was from a dirty, ill-lit mews in Soho. The girl walked quickly down the mews, turned left, and two men joined her.

"Well?"

Superintendent Anthony Slade of Department X2, New Scotland Yard, had waited patiently for the girl's return. His companion, Sergeant Clinton, had been alarmingly sceptical in the interval of waiting.

"He's got them," she said.

"And you're still ready to go through with it?"

"I'd do anything to get Jim a fresh start. He isn't a real crook, Superintendent. I've told you, it's Brash.' He's got

Jim under his thumb—purposely. Every time he makes Jim do a job it's to be the last time, and it never is."

Her face was pale in the thin light of the gas-lit street.

"You haven't mentioned this to anyone?" queried Slade, watching her closely.

But there was no guile in her face, only an honest love for the one man who meant more to her than all else in the world. Her love for Jim Pennell had taken her to Scotland Yard, where she had driven a hard bargain. Slade was after the Gaintree Rubies, stolen from Sir Edward Gaintree's country home a month ago. She had promised to deliver the Gaintree Rubies and the man responsible for their theft to Slade in return for promised immunity for Jim Pennell, the young tool of an unscrupulous crook. As Slade himself admitted, it *had* been a hard bargain—but a bargain none the less. For years Scotland Yard had been waiting for a suitable opportunity to tap Miles Brash on the shoulder. Now a girl whose love was the most beautiful thing in a drab life had agreed to make that opportunity.

"No," she told Slade. "This means too much to me. I haven't talked. Listen. Jim's going aboard the *Prunella* at two o'clock. Brash will be there to receive the rubies. Jim's room has been searched twice—but that double-crosser Brash didn't get them. I had them. I was holding them for Jim. It was keeping them there in my own room that gave the idea to me... the idea to come to you."

Her voice was thin, as though strained through a sieve of mental anxiety.

Slade patted her arm reassuringly.

"You're taking a risk—a big risk," he said, "but we shan't let you down. Do you remember... everything?"

She nodded, and patted her throat with ungloved fingers.

"When we're away I'll drop this scarf. That'll be a signal. And now, I'd better be going. Have you—the others?"

Sergeant Clinton made a rumbling sound as Slade took a small cloth bag from his inside pocket. It chinked as the girl dropped it inside her handbag—a bag too large for ordinary evening wear. They walked in silence to the end of the street, and the girl was sped away in a taxi driven by a C.I.D. man in plain clothes. Slade and Clinton climbed into a low car with a powerful engine. The driver had his instructions. He followed the taxi.

Taxi and car turned eastwards.

"We're taking a big risk," Clinton grunted.

"How? We shan't have those rubies out of our sight," said Slade. "And if we get Brash—once get him, and can put him on the shelf for a while—we shall clean up a third of the crime in London. He's got all ten fingers in a very fruity pie."

"But Pennell——?"

Clinton's doubt remained.

"A young fool," grunted Slade, "but lucky to have a girl like Doreen Thirsk to think for him. Brash knew he was with a Birmingham safe-building firm, and when he was thrown out of work caught him neatly with a forged signature. Ever since Pennell has had to play whatever tune Brash has called. You heard what the girl said. Pennell's been told to crack a number of cribs, and every one has been 'the last.' Brash could give points to any blackmailer."

Slade took something from his pocket and examined it with his fingers. It was an automatic.

"We must get Brash—alive," he said.

The cars ran through deserted streets, left the city for the East End, and turned into the narrow thoroughfares of Dockland. Here and there along the waterfront arc-lights blazed over groaning and straining derricks, where some overdue freighter was being unloaded. Donkey-engines puffed and rumbled like tiring giants.

The taxi turned down a side-road, the following police car kept straight on. Slade was too old a hand at crook-chasing to allow his quarry to get his scent to windward. The police car drew into the shadows of a wharf. Slade and Clinton trod a flooring of rotten timber seamed with mud, which protruded over a support of great iron piles. To one pile was tethered a boat. Amidships sat another plain-clothes man. Half an hour before he had taken the precaution of oiling the rowlocks and muffling the oars.

Slade and his assistant got into the boat, and the former peered across the blackness of the Thames. Runnels of light disappeared into a slight haze, which made distance deceiving.

"Got your bearings for the *Prunella* right, Jackson?" he asked the man standing ready to throw off the mooring-rope.

"Yes, sir. She's a hundred yards down, in midstream. Can't miss her."

Slade stared again across the murmuring waters, where he knew the girl was rowing.

"We'll give her a quarter of an hour, and then cast off."

"Yes, sir." Jackson sat down.

Doreen Thirsk headed her tiny boat straight into midstream, and was grateful that she had spent long hours at tennis, for the exertion was more strenuous than she had realized. A pain crept down from her shoulders to the lower muscles of her back, and a bewildering tiredness assailed her. Excitement, which had hitherto buoyed her hopes and flagging spirits, passed, leaving in its stead cold, sober truth. She was taking a desperate hazard.

She pressed her lips together and pulled harder.

Drawing the oars inboard, she allowed her tiny craft to drift under the counter of the moored motor-vessel. She hitched the painter to a rope-ladder, and climbed upward to the deck. Cautiously she looked about her before stepping forward. The deck was deserted, but from aft light streamed through an open companion-way.

She took her courage in both hands and stole forward, keeping in the shadow of a deck-house. She had almost reached the companionway when a man's heavy tread could be heard approaching. He was whistling under his breath. She crouched back, and a hand fumbled in the capacious handbag she had brought with her.

The man drew abreast, and she prayed that he would go past without seeing her. But luck that had been with her thus far now deserted her. The man took a pipe from his pocket, and dropped his pouch. As he stooped to retrieve it he saw the sheen of her pale stockings. With an oath he straightened.

Doreen was desperate. She swung up an arm and lunged in the same movement, and the butt of the gun she had taken from her handbag dug through the cloth of the man's cap, and he fell to the deck, limbs a-sprawl.

There was no time to lose. She sprang to the companion-way, and went below.

In a cabin lit with two flaring electric lights a pasty-faced man with a thin shadow of moustache black along his upper lip sat at a table, his hands turned palm upward. There was a smirk on Miles Brash's face It was not a

healthy smirk. The young man seated opposite him would have liked nothing so much as to wipe that smirk from the oily face. For months Jim Pennell had loathed Miles Brash —and feared him. Now he knew that he hated him. He hated him because again Brash had fooled him.

"So you won't give me that paper, Brash?"

Brash shook his head, took a smouldering cigarette from an ash-tray, and stuck it in the centre of his mouth. His shoulders were hunched about his ears, and the smirk grew in size to a smile—of derision.

"I am not a simpleton, my dear Jim. You are very useful to me." He took a wallet from his pocket, and drew some pieces of paper from it. All save one were crinkly five pound notes, the other bore the name he'd got Pennell to put to a statement when under the influence of drink. "These you can have"—he pushed the notes towards Pennell—"but not this." He patted the document. "It is such a pleasant kind of—whip."

Pennell drew breath, but did not pick up the money.

Brash shrugged.

"Don't be foolish, my dear fellow. Good money is scarce these days, and this has the additional virtue of being ... easy, shall I say?"

Miles Brash was a crook with a sense of humour, which made him a better crook than most.

"That was my last job, Brash."

Jim Pennell was thinking of a girl with a pleading look in her eyes, and his mind was made up. Brash, quick to realize the change in the other, spread his hands in a soothing gesture.

"Let us complete it first, Jim." The pupils of his eyes contracted for a moment. "You have ... what you were to bring me?"

Pennell placed on the table the package given him by Doreen.

"I always keep my word—even to a crook, Brash. You had my room searched twice, but you've taught me to be careful."

Brash grinned lightly.

"So—an observant pupil."

He untied the package and held it up. On to the table

cascaded a heap of gleaming red stones. For an instant Brash sat back, smiling with satisfaction, then suddenly he swooped forward, a claw-like hand picked up several of the stones and held them up to the light. He turned them this way and that, and swiftly bounded to his feet. By some feat of legerdemain a short, snub-nosed automatic had appeared in his left hand.

"Paste—by God!" he cried.

Jim Pennell's eyes widened. He knew that he was staring at death. But he was as surprised as the other. Paste! ... He had given the real stones to Doreen, the real Gaintree Rubies! It was impossible, yet...

Slowly he rose. Brash watched him with the gaze of a sparrow-hawk about to sweep down upon a field-mouse.

"It's not true—it can't be!" muttered Pennell.

"No, it can't be," sneered Brash, his fleshy throat bulging, "but it so happens that it is. Pennell, you've made the mistake of trying to double-cross Miles Brash. I say trying, because no man has ever succeeded—and lived."

The wicked-looking snout of the automatic pushed forward another six inches.

"But I swear, Brash, that I don't know a thing about it! I thought I had the real stones—honest, I——"

Pennell stopped, his face dewed with sweat. The atmosphere in that cabin was close. The breathing of both men could be heard at the door.

"You liar!" Brash's voice had sunk to a low, vicious tone. "I had your rooms searched. The stones were not there. You've got rid of them, and collected. And you've tried to pull a fast one." He smiled again—horribly; and again his shoulders hunched under his ears. "You were right, Pennell, you've done your last job—your last on earth, by heaven! His forehead was drawn skin-tight, bunches of muscle hiding the lids of his eyes. A seething rage possessed the man. "I'm going to kill——"

He did not complete the sentence. Something beyond Pennell attracted his attention. The baited man saw amazement chase hate from Brash's face; then the snub-nosed automatic veered in a swift arc.

But another gun spoke first, and the bullet shattered Miles Brash's left arm. He dropped his gun and moaned.

Pennell, jumping for it, raised himself and turned—to stare incredulously into the set face of Doreen.

In the girl's hand was a gun, from the muzzle of which a feather of smoke coiled upwards.

"Doreen!"

"Careful, Jim. Don't get in my line of fire. I'm taking no chances."

"But——"

"No time to explain now. We've got to move fast."

Her coolness surprised herself. She realized that it was for such a moment as this that she had lived and ate her heart out of nights. She took fierce joy from Brash's plight; such joy as only a woman can experience who has stepped to the edge of hell for the man she loves.

"The paper, Jim."

Prompted by her cool tone, Jim Pennell recovered himself. He grabbed the forged document from the table, under the baleful glare of Brash's eyes. The man had slumped into his chair. Pennell hesitated, then reached for the notes.

"No!" cried the girl.

Pennell dropped them. He could not know that two days before, in an office at Scotland Yard, Superintendent Anthony Slade had discussed just such a moment with a wild-eyed girl, or that Slade, wise in the ways of arch-trickers of Brash's kidney, had warned the girl against taking any money of large denomination.

Doreen Thirsk's mind was working now like a machine, smoothly, efficiently.

"But, Doreen——"

Again she cut short his protest. She walked up to Miles Brash, pushed something into his left-hand pocket, which he could not reach with his right hand, and scooped up the paste rubies from the table, slipping them into her bag.

"Let's go, Jim."

As they turned to the door, footsteps beat upon the stairs of the companion-way. Two broad-shouldered men rushed forward. Jim stopped one with a straightened left. The second swore and dragged a knife from his belt. Doreen could have shot him, but she did not think of the gun still grasped in her hand. She lashed out with a slim foot, and caught the man on the shin. The arm holding the knife dropped as his knees crooked. Jim lunged in with a cruel right hook.

"Now!" he panted.

They reached the deck.

"This way." In the beam from a riding-light Jim saw that Doreen's face was aglow with pleasure. "Here." She clutched his arm.

As they dropped into the boat something black drove out of the night. Jim fended with the oars, and got away. The black object passed them, and only Doreen knew that Superintendent Slade had arrived, according to plan.

"Faster, Jim, faster!" she cried, in her heart a sudden peace.

"Doreen," panted Jim, between strokes, "what does it all mean? Why did you——?"

"Not now, darling... later."

From behind them came the bark of automatics, angry, clamorous. Slade and Clinton had found the two men Jim Pennell had downed ready to fight; but the Yard men acted with strategic abruptness. Miles Brash's henchmen, both wounded, threw up their hands.

In the cabin sat Miles Brash, unable with his shattered arm to reach into his left-hand pocket.

"Had a disagreement with someone, Brash?" asked Slade pleasantly.

"Go to hell!" grunted the wounded man.

Slade nodded to Clinton, and the sergeant went through the other's pockets. He produced the package Doreen had concealed. Slade opened it. On to the table flowed a stream of living fire.

"My God!" cried Brash, bending close. "The Gaintree Rubies!"

"How well you know, Brash!" mocked Slade.

Brash's eyes pin-pointed.

"This is a frame-up! By heaven, you won't make it stick! You can't prove——"

He stopped. Something in Slade's face stayed the words.

"Dope-running? White-slave trafficking? Blackmail?" Slade shook his head. "No, Brash, I can't prove any of those. But you're going to gaol for the stealing of the Gaintree Rubies. You see, we've caught you with the goods on you, and I think I can satisfy a jury that the man who busted Sir Edward Gaintree's safe was left-handed. Didn't think of that, did you? And—— Hello!" Slade had picked up the notes. He opened his pocket-book and turned to a page. He smiled. "The bone is sweeter than I had thought, Brash. Notes from the vaults of the City and Borough Bank. Remember? Some-

one engineered a clever piece of work there, but a night-watchman lost his life."

Brash saw that his last prop had given under him.

"Damn you!" he growled. "How did Pennell get that set of fakes?"

"Pennell?" inquired Slade innocently.

"Yes, damn you—Pennell. And that girl, who made the plant on me. She wouldn't let him take that money——"

Slade smiled.

"You've been dreaming, Brash—and not a very pleasant dream, I should say. A man of action like yourself shouldn't form such a bad habit."

Brash swore, and the plain-clothes man who had rowed Slade and Clinton out to the *Prunella* entered the cabin in time to hear the more encarmined part. He grinned appreciatively, and held out to Slade something he had found on deck.

"Can't make out, sir, how this scarf came here. Looks like a woman's, but there isn't a female on the ship unless that cat I saw——"

"I shouldn't spend too long puzzling it out, Jackson," said Slade, glancing at Clinton, whose dour face was set in an expression devoid of any emotion.

Jackson looked disappointed. He was young to the Force, and all his illusions had not gone.

"But if there's a woman in this gang, sir, chances are she'll have information—and a price."

Again Slade caught Clinton's eye. He glanced down at the table.

"I should think it very probable that she has—information, Jackson," he said slowly; "but I should say her price was far above rubies."

THE BARB OF DEATH.

IT IS the small, unconsidered acts of everyday life that determine the time and trend of big events. As the world knows, a woodland spider's efforts prompted a king from his lethargy, and resulted in a freed kingdom.

In a way, Glenda Warren's dropping a ball of knitting-wool may be compared to the historic fluke that caused the spider to drop from his bough over Robert Bruce's face. Certainly it was just as fortuitous. Yet had she not dropped her wool she would not have remembered her uncle's birthday, and would most certainly not have bought him a tie—and then the chances are that Superintendent Anthony Slade of Department X2, New Scotland Yard, would not have arrested a clever murderer. In such fashion does Fate weave a pattern in human lives and destinies.

It was a ball of red wool that Glenda dropped, but that hardly matters. She was knitting her fiancé a cardigan, and it *did* drop from her lap, and in that perverse way that balls of wool have, it rolled half-way across the room—in fact, to the leg of a writing-desk on which was a calendar. As she stooped to pick up the wool she saw the calendar... and the date. "Heavens! Tomorrow's the thirteenth!" she exclaimed. "Uncle John's birthday, and I've forgotten the poor dear." Then her wide blue eyes grew very round. "And it's a Friday!"

All of which was disturbingly true. Glenda spent most of the morning window-shopping along Oxford and Regent Streets, and it was not until she had refreshed herself with a cup of tea at four o'clock that she made up her mind to buy a tie. It was a very nice tie—at least, the young and good-looking salesman assured her that it was. Glenda remembered, even after the last hour of that dreadful Friday had ticked away, that he had had a becoming cleft. She liked men with clefts in their chins. Percy hadn't a cleft in his chin. As a matter of fact, Percy had very little chin at all; but then Percy was *different*. He was her fiancé. It was because she wished to talk to her uncle about Percy that she finally made up her mind to take the tie to his hotel herself.

John Pendleton, her uncle, was a bachelor. He was also "something in the City"; and he preferred to live in a hotel, he said, because the service was the best he could get anywhere.

A deep twilight was settling in the London streets when Glenda arrived at the Marchmont, where her uncle lived. She went up in the lift, and got out at the fourth floor and walked along to a door numbered 4K. She was about to press the bell, when she saw that the door was unlatched. Curiously, she pushed the door open. The room beyond was unlit. A faint greyish blue was the window opposite the door. Apart from this, the room could be said to be in darkness.

She entered, and stretched out a hand for the light switch.

She did not reach it. A dark shape rose beside her, and a pair of gripping arms imprisoned her. She opened her mouth, very naturally, to scream, but a large hand was pushed over her face. She felt her knees give, yet with that peculiar reflexive mentality which men find to be so difficult to understand in a woman, even in that moment when her senses were reeling, she wondered if her stockings really were ladder-proof. The salesman had said...

That was all she remembered until she came to with a choking, tight sensation in her throat. She was lying on the floor—on a carpet, to be exact—and it took her some moments to recall the sequence of events immediately prior to finding herself in this ridiculous situation. And then, suddenly, the situation was no longer ridiculous to

her. Out of the darkness of the room materialized a fear, and at its cold touch she shuddered.

"There must be a window open," she thought, but she knew she was trying to fool herself. No draught from an open window had sent that strange sensation coursing down her spine.

She remembered the hands over her face.

Quickly she rose and snapped on the light. The room was empty save for herself. As she gazed upon familiar objects she recovered much of her disturbed poise. She walked to the door connecting with her uncle's sitting-room, which was arranged as a kind of study, with shelves of books, desk, and telephone.

Her hand stretched to the light-switch, pressed it down.

She gasped. Her uncle lay sprawled across the floor, a leg drawn under his somewhat ample paunch, his eyes staring wide.

"Uncle John!"

She rushed to his side. His skin felt warm, but there was no life in the blue cords knotting his forehead, no sight in those balls of glassy tissue protruding below his waxy eyelids.

"He's—dead!"

She murmured the words with awe, and became conscious that clutched in her hand was the little bundle containing his birthday present. Like a person in a trance, she picked up the 'phone receiver, and told the hotel exchange operator, "I am in suite 4K. My uncle, Mr. Pendleton, is dead. I think he has been murdered. Will you tell the police?"

She dropped the 'phone into its cradle, and sat stiffly in an armchair until someone entered. She looked up. He was a large man with curly, reddish hair.

"I'm the hotel detective," he said, and somehow he made it sound like an accusation. "Did you do it?"

She said in a tiny voice, "No," and went on to tell him of the hands that had gripped her.

"All right," said the hotel detective, "I've been on to the station; they've been through to the Yard. This is a Central job, and you'll be wanted."

Glenda didn't know what he was talking about, she just

nodded. It might have been two minutes later, while the hotel detective was examining a loose button he had picked up from the floor in the outer room, that a clock began striking. Glenda looked at her watch, and said, "Oh!"

The man heard her and came back. He had the button in a handkerchief.

"What's the matter?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's seven o'clock. Well, I was coming up in the lift at twelve minutes to."

He nodded, and went back to the other room.

At twenty-past seven two men entered and held a muttered conversation with the hotel detective, who then left. Superintendent Anthony Slade, accompanied by his chief assistant, Sergeant Clinton, went into the room where the girl was sitting, her back to the dead body of her uncle.

Again she repeated her story. Slade gave her more confidence than the hotel detective. His manner was more gentle, his eyes were not so hard. He said, "Thank you, Miss Warren," when she had finished.

On the desk he placed the button picked up by the hotel detective. "She must have struggled," he told Clinon, "and tore this from his sleeve. It isn't one of her own buttons."

Clinton nodded. He had been examining the grate, and had picked out several burnt pieces of paper. The detectives bent over them. Here and there scraps of writing were visible. It was neat writing, revealing a tidy hand. They made out the words "desperate," "finally," "implore."

"Looks like a begging letter," said Clinton. Signature, date, address were gone.

Slade went over to the writing-desk.

"Come here, Clinton," he said. He held up a letter on top. "Look at the writing."

Clinton compared the writing of the letter with the few visible words on the charred scraps from the grate.

"The same," he declared.

"Anyway, we can suppose so," said Slade. "But this letter is dated yesterday, and presumably was delivered today."

It ran:

Dear John,

Further to my 'phone call, I shall be calling at your hotel at seven forty-five tomorrow. We can have a spot of food and discuss the deal.

Mortimer.

"He's due in about ten minutes," said Clinton. "Wonder who he is."

Slade went to the girl. "Miss Warren," he asked, "do you know a business acquaintance of your uncle's whose Christian or surname is Mortimer?"

She shook her head.

"No, poor Uncle John was a funny old bird in some things. Didn't care for women in business. Wouldn't talk business with them. I believe he was as hard as nails."

"How did you gather that impression?"

"Things Percy let drop from time to time?"

"Percy?"

"My fiancé—Percy Wickham. He has a cousin in the City who knows my—I mean, knew my uncle." She choked. "Percy's cousin says Uncle John was a keen businessman, a fighter I believe he called him. He said there had been men he had broken."

"You don't recall the names of any?"

"No."

"Or the name of your fiancé's cousin?"

"No, I don't think—— Just a minute!" she broke off, frowning thoughtfully. "I've got an idea *his* name is Mortimer."

Slade nodded.

"Ever seen him, Miss Warren?"

"No, Percy talks a lot about him, but I'm not sure I like the sound of him. He's a market gambler. Money comes and goes easily with him. Percy admires that type. I don't. In fact, I had come here partly to speak to Uncle John about Percy. I'm not happy about him. I think I've made a mistake—I mean, I think our engagement is a mistake."

She pawed the floor with a dainty shoe-toe. Slade waited,

and his patience was rewarded; she offered a further piece of confidence.

"Percy's in a wholesale tobacco firm, and he's got no go in him. The only time he saw Uncle John was when he gave me an engagement party, and he was fool enough to talk business. He didn't sell the cigars to Uncle John." She sounded keyed up. "Uncle John took them out of pity for me. That's what I hated—that look of pity in Uncle John's face."

Slade moved away as she buried her eyes in a tiny lace handkerchief

He stood frowning over the body. Clinton was rummaging through the drawers of the writing-desk.

Slade stooped, picked up a cigar that had smouldered out on the carpet. It was similar in shape and size to the cigars in the large box on the desk. He placed the cigar in a clean ash-tray and turned his attention to the body. He could find no wound, but caught in the dead man's teeth was a leaf from the cigar. Obviously he had been smoking the cigar when he died.

The Yard man examined the cigar. The rounded end that had been in the dead man's mouth had been pierced by a cigar-plunger. The hole was neatly drilled. On the desk was such a tool.

Had the man been poisoned? Getting down on his knees, Slade smelled the dead man's mouth. There was a faint smell of tobacco; that was all. No stained glass was to be seen. He looked in a spirits-cabinet, but so far as he could tell the rows of bottles and glasses had been undisturbed. He was puzzled. The darkness in which the girl had found the suite, the violence with which she had been attacked, the corridor door left unlatched, obviously in case of emergency—all presupposed a murderer who had slain quickly... with violence.

But there was no sign of violence on John Pendleton's body.

How had he died? That was the question that took first place in the inquiring detective's mind. He had not been strangled. The throat was clear of bruises. A superficial examination had shown his body unmarked by a blot of blood from a needle's puncture. There was no visible wound.

"Look here."

Clinton was holding out a book he had found in one of the drawers of the writing-desk. It was a notebook, filled with personal business memoranda; and one page was devoted to a record of Cyril Mortimer's indebtedness to John Pendleton. On account of money advanced, shares bought and resold, Cyril Mortimer owed the dead man the sum of nine thousand eight hundred and forty-three pounds.

"Nice little nest-egg," said Clinton, his dour face empty of expression.

Slade glanced at the piece of charred paper, and said drily, "Quite, Clinton. What has happened must be a relief to Mr. Mortimer, who is due any minute."

Cyril Mortimer—he proved to be Percy Wickham's cousin—arrived five minutes late. His effusive air of *bonhomie* gave way with mercurial rapidity to frigid amazement when he was informed why he would not be allowed to keep his appointment.

Slade sat the man in a chair under a strong light, and explained in detail, and while he explained he watched the other's face. Mortimer had to look up, so that the light washed all shadow from his face. He was a thick-set man, well dressed in dark brown clothes.

But Slade did not like him. There was a fishy stare in the man's eyes, and in his manner was a subtle effrontery—not exactly mocking, yet sufficiently pronounced for Slade, quickly perceptive, to be aware of it. But what interested Slade most were faint, reddish lines forming a curved V down the bridge of Mortimer's nose.

"I'm sorry you are in the light, Mr. Mortimer," said the Yard man. "I didn't mean to try your eyes. Do you wear glasses?"

"No, Superintendent. That's all right. Really, you know, this is frightfully upsetting..."

"Very smooth," thought Slade, but Mr. Mortimer had told a lie. He *had* worn glasses, and for a prolonged period, until a short while ago.

Slade's sharp eyes noted other details. Mr. Mortimer's hair had been very recently pomaded. At the end of the comb-lines were tiny blobs of hair-oil; and just beneath Mr. Mortimer's rather patrician nose was a fresh razor-nick. It was not bleeding, because some form of styptic had been applied; the whitish blur of the dried alum was

easily discernible with the light focussed full in the other's face.

"I have seen your letter to Mr. Pendleton," Slade told the other. "You had come to discuss business."

"That's right. I 'phoned him yesterday. You see, I owed him quite a sum"—Cyril Mortimer's gaze was bland, his lips almost twitched into a half-smile—"and could repay him through a large-size deal I was undertaking."

Slade asked him a number of routine questions, and watched him afterwards cross to Glenda Warren.

"My dear girl," he said, "I am most terribly sorry. Your uncle was a charming man, a really charming man."

Slade glanced at the charred pieces of paper. Clinton had thoughtfully hidden them from Mortimer's gaze by pushing them behind a vase of flowers.

Cyril Mortimer placed an arm in a brotherly gesture round the back of the girl's chair. She wriggled farther away from him, but he did not appear to notice.

Something on Mortimer's cuff caught Slade's eye. He walked across the room, apparently intent upon measuring the number of paces across the floor, but his gaze was on that marked cuff. He decided, as he came back, that the mark, shiny and pale, was drying soap.

Drying soap.

Thoughtfully Slade came back to the desk, opened the handkerchief, and looked at the button. It was dark blue, and the threads of unravelled cotton were a similar colour. Probably torn from a Navy blue jacket made by a tailor, who was expensive, because only an expensive and rather exclusive West End tailor would take the pains to get a cotton to match in tone the buttons of a suit. Most tailors were content with black thread for Navy blue suits.

The Yard man looked at the set of the brown jacket across Mortimer's shoulders. It was perfect.

He said to Clinton, "Don't let him touch the body or anything on the desk or in the grate. I'm going out for a few minutes. Shan't be long. When I come back we'll 'phone for the fingerprints man and doctor. They're waiting downstairs. Then we'll have the photos taken."

Clinton nodded. He knew from past experience that Anthony Slade was on to something.

Slade was. He had realized that John Pendleton might

have been the victim of a very clever and very callous murderer. He couldn't tell yet how the murder had been committed, but he was certain that the murderer was content in his own mind that he had thought out every move with perfect precision.

Outside Slade spoke to the hotel detective.

"Good at faces?" he asked.

"Fair," said the man.

"All right. Try this one. Square face, rather pale, prominent nose with slight hook, wide-set brown eyes, heavy eyebrows. Hair probably loose—I can't be sure about that—but wearing glasses, and with a darkish moustache that extends to the corners of the mouth. Make anything of it?"

The man wrinkled his face, and said, "There's several in this hotel that might answer, Superintendent. What colour is the hair, and what sort of clothes did this person wear?"

"Hair dark, but not as dark as the moustache, I should say, and he was most probably seen in a very well-cut Navy serge."

"Sounds like Mr. Nelson, Superintendent."

"How long's he been here?"

"'Bout a week. Don't see him much, though. Keeps to himself. Bit secretive, if you ask me."

"I want to see this Mr. Nelson's room," said Slade.

After a little wrangle it was arranged. The hotel detective took Slade up to the next floor. Mr. Nelson did not answer the ring at his doorbell, and Slade told the hotel detective to use his pass-key. They went into Mr. Nelson's suite.

At the foot of the bed were a couple of brown leather bags. They were locked, but this did not afford much of an obstacle to the Yard man. In one he found some sleeping-things and several articles of toilet. In the other were coiled shirts, collars, underclothes, some ties, and a Navy serge suit. He held up the coat. A button was missing from the right-hand side. The other buttons were blue, sewn with blue thread.

Slade replaced the bags, and pointed to the initials on them. "C.M.," he said, "doesn't stand for Nelson—or does it?"

The hotel detective grinned, but said nothing. Slade evidently knew what he was doing, and this was confirmed when in the adjoining bathroom he found a paper with shaving-soap and long dark hairs adhering to it, and murmured, "I thought so. Very clever."

Slade went back to suite 4K.

Clinton was twiddling his fingers, Mortimer was still talking to the girl. He was smoking a cigarette. He threw the cigarette away as Slade entered.

"Well, Superintendent," he said, "do you mind if I——?"

"I'm afraid I do, Mr. Mortimer," said Slade. "You see, I must ask you to come along to the Yard with me and make a statement."

Mortimer's brows went up in high arches.

"Really, I fail to see why."

The man was calm, collected, as cool as a piece of ice.

"Mr. Mortimer," said Slade, "you owed Mr. Pendleton a very considerable amount of money——"

"True, but I admitted as much."

"You did. But you did not admit that you had some time ago written a pleading letter to Mr. Pendleton and did not get what you would have considered a satisfactory reply." Slade crossed to the desk, picked up the pieces of charred paper, and held them out. "An expert comparison with your writing on this sheet of paper"—he pointed to the letter dated the previous day—"will establish that you wrote both letters. I think too, that with this—shall I call it clue?"—he produced the blue button—"I shall be able to establish that the identities of Mr. Nelson and Mr. Mortimer are one and the same. You had no hope of paying off a debt of nearly ten thousand pounds, and Mr. Pendleton was pressing. You came here, took a suite, grew a moustache, wore glasses, and adopted a fresh identity. As this Mr. Nelson you called on Mr. Pendleton and killed him. Unfortunately, just as you were completing the task, burning that old letter, I should say, Miss Warren came in. You had left the door open as a precaution. It proved a danger. Miss Warren gave you hardly any warning. You attacked her."

The girl gasped and drew away from Mortimer, who rose and stood rigid before the accusing detective.

Slade went on quietly. "You had left a prepared letter here, to justify a call on Mr. Pendleton as yourself within three-quarters of an hour of his death. You returned to your room, shaved off your moustache, dressed yourself in another suit, concealed your glasses—they're probably in your pocket now—and came back. It would have been the surest way of throwing dust in the eyes of the police, and you all but succeeded. Unfortunately, you did not wipe all the soap from your sleeve—you washed hurriedly, as I can understand, in the circumstances—and you are fortunate in employing the services of an excellent tailor, one who looks to such meticulous details as the thread with which his buttons are sewn to his garments. I ask you, have you anything to say, because I must warn you now that anything you tell me will be later used——"

"Spare me that, Superintendent," mocked Mortimer. 'Just satisfy my overweening curiosity by telling me how I am supposed to have killed John Pendleton."

"He was poisoned, of course," said Slade slowly. "Just how I am not sure, but an analysis of his blood will prove that, and a microscopic examination of the surface of his body will show how."

Mortimer smiled lazily.

"Very clever, Superintendent. I must congratulate you." He took a cigar from his pocket and placed it in his mouth, while feeling with his other hand for matches. "But I ask you, before a jury, now what will you——"

He paused to strike a match. In that moment Slade sprang. His fist knocked the cigar from the other's mouth. Mortimer kicked and punched, but Clinton rushed in. After a brief struggle the prisoner was handcuffed.

Perspiring, his clothes awry, Slade picked up the fallen cigar.

"I see now," he said, pointing to the hole in the end. "You got the cigar from your cousin, Mr. Wickham. It is identical with those he sold to Mr. Pendleton. Only that one, like this, was already prepared, the hole drilled in it. Inside the hole I shall find—what? A tiny needle, that at one suck of the cigar will enter the roof of the victim's mouth? I rather think so. That is why I did not find the wound. Very ingenious, Mr. Mortimer. A veritable barb of death. But you shouldn't have been smoking a cigarette when I came in. That was just another small slip-up."

Mortimer's poise was gone. He was staring at the detective with wild eyes, the whites tinged with blood. He had played a bold, clever game, and lost at the last throw.

"Damn you!" he muttered.

Slade took no notice. He picked up the 'phone and said, "Send up to 4K the two gentlemen waiting, please, and order a taxi. Then get me through to Scotland Yard—and hurry!"

MURDER AT MOON FARM

THE STALLION neighed shrilly and raised a hairy fetlock. The pounding of his hoof shook the stable, and light from the smoky oil-lamp ran along his flanks in satiny waves.

"I'll send a man over for him next week, Mr. Radd."

Stephen Radd smiled.

"If you want to sell that brood mare——" he began, but the other shook his head.

"'Fraid that's out of the question, Mr. Radd. But if that stallion's open for someone to make a deal . . ."

Farmer Bunnyman paused hopefully. However, this time Stephen Radd shook his head.

"It looks as though we're pulling the same cart, Bunnyman."

They left the stable. Daylight was waning, and a young moon was already riding the eastern sky. They walked across the Long Paddock, smoking their pipes, and silent for the most part. Few of the neighbouring farmers found much to say to Stephen Radd. A gentleman farmer was still an individual they could not completely comprehend.

"Of course, if you should change your mind, Mr. Radd."

"That's not a thing I do easily, Bunnyman."

Long shadows invaded the hills to the west, the crimson of the sunset touching their blunt peaks with glory. Rooks veered in high, cawing circles over the feathered tops of the beeches ringing the boundary of Moon Farm.

"Will you be entering him for the show, Mr. Radd?" Bunnyman inquired thoughtfully.

"I think Rufus is good for a second prize, at least——"

That was as far as Stephen Radd got. They had approached the narrow plantation of beeches, beyond which lay a badly-surfaced country lane and the grounds of Dawton Hall, the home of the local squire. The grass was long, for with the heavy rains it had grown quickly since a scythe

had last mown it. Almost at the fringe of the beeches the two men had walked upon a spot where the long grass was noticeably flattened.

Stephen Radd's reflection that his stallion should get at least a second prize at the forthcoming local show was cut short by his companion's cry of, "My God! Look there, Mr. Radd. It's—yes, it's a man!"

Bunnyman spoke truly. The depression in the grass was made by the body of a man who lay sprawled at a grotesque angle. His back was uppermost, and from between his shoulders protruded the shaft of an arrow.

Bunnyman knelt.

"It's Perry, who keeps the Fox and Hounds, Mr. Radd. He's dead—and that arrow!" Bunnyman looked up wonderingly into the grave face of Stephen Radd. "There's only one person in these parts as I know of, Mr. Radd, as shoots arrows—the Squire! And—and——"

The farmer rose, looked at Stephen Radd, and then glanced towards the beeches. Radd nodded slowly, the frown on his face deepening. Everyone in that countryside knew Philip Dawton's skill as an archer. He had left his college team, and in the grounds of the Hall, beyond that now ominous fringe of beech-trees, were erected three large targets.

"And"—Bunnyman recovered his breath—"we all know the way Perry felt about the Squire and his daughter Alice. It—it looks bad, Mr. Radd. I like the Squire. He's a nice young gentleman, and likely to be as good a man as his father. But—but——"

As they turned back to the Moon Farm buildings Stephen Radd said thoughtfully, "I'll have to 'phone the police station at Wonchester. I think I must agree with you, Bunnyman ... it looks bad."

Chief Constable Gordon agreed with both men when he heard what had happened. The news was broken to him by Inspector Curphy, of the local county constabulary. "Broken" is the rightful expression in this connection, because Gordon took the news like a blow. The late Squire, Philip Dawton's father, had been his best friend. "Looks as though we'll have to arrest Philip Dawton," Curphy had said.

Gordon decided to invoke the aid of Scotland Yard, and he was a man who, when he had made a decision, wasted no time. Next morning found him at the Wonchester police station, seated with Curphy, when Superintendent Anthony Slade of the Criminal Investigation Department (X2); New

Scotland Yard, and his chief assistant, Sergeant Clinton, were announced.

Slade's grey eyes noted the pencillings of anxiety in the Chief Constable's face, and secretly the Yard detective admired the way Gordon put his personal feelings on one side and gave all his attention to the letter of the law.

"It's a bad circumstantial case, Superintendent," he told Slade. "Philip Dawton is the son of my oldest friend, but Perry was killed with his arrow, and he and Perry had quarrelled, and the issue was the oldest in history—a girl. Perry was her father. He kept the Fox and Hounds, and he had a strange streak in him that made him distrust rich men and their relations with the women of the poorer classes. To Perry's mind it was inconceivable that Phil could fall in love genuinely with his daughter Alice. That the girl was obviously in love with Phil counted nothing. I understand it was a bitter quarrel."

He paused.

Slade put his first question.

"Does Mr. Dawton admit shooting the arrow?"

The Chief Constable smiled bleakly. "He denies it—strenuously."

"How does he account for the arrow?"

"He says that more than a week ago he discovered one to be missing."

"Did he mention that fact to anyone?"

"Unfortunately no. He thought he must have mislaid it."

The corners of Slade's mouth puckered.

"A strange article to... mislay, sir."

The Chief Constable nodded heavily, and made no comment. Slade asked, "May I see the weapon?"

Inspector Curphy produced the arrow found by Stephen Radd and Farmer Bunnyman protruding from Matthew Perry's back. The sharp head and several inches of the ash shaft were stained with dried blood.

"Fingerprints?" Slade inquired.

"Not a one," vouchsafed Curphy.

Slade passed the weapon to Clinton with a muttered word of instruction. The dour-faced sergeant took a small folding-rule from his pocket and made a few measurements of the arrow, entering the details in his notebook.

"I'd like to have a word with Radd and Farmer Bunnyman," said Slade, when Curphy had outlined all the Wonchester police knew of the case, "and I'd like to see the place where the body was found."

Curphy looked at the Chief Constable.

"We can fix that easily, Superintendent," said Gordon. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Radd and Bunnyman have been into Wonchester this morning for questioning after a statement was taken from Phil. Curphy can get them for you."

"Thanks. I'd like a word with the police surgeon who performed the post-mortem, if that's possible."

"Jenkinson's in the building now. The inquest is this afternoon, and he's getting his case in order. This affair has caused considerable local interest, you will understand, Superintendent, and the chances are the jury will have a number of questions to put to Dr. Jenkinson."

"And Mr. Dawton. He is not——?"

A frown laced the Chief Constable's brown eyes.

"No, he is not under arrest...yet. But the inquest will not prove pleasant for him. And afterwards——"

The Chief Constable rose. He felt there was little he could add.

When he had gone Curphy stroked his chin.

"He's taking it hard. The Gordons and the Dawtons were thick as peas. This'll break him up. Hard luck, and I personally like Dawton, but I don't think he's got a chance in a million. He lost his temper and let fly—literally."

Slade offered no comment. The case had interesting possibilities. He saw Dr. Jenkinson, and learned from the police surgeon that the wound was three and a half inches deep. The arrow had been aimed straight into Matthew Perry's heart.

"Young Dawton's getting no sympathy, I hear," he remarked. "Striking a man in the back is dirty work, however you consider it."

Stephen Radd and Farmer Bunnyman had nothing to add to the statement each had made and signed.

"Are we attending the inquest?" Clinton inquired, as the two sat over a lunch served in the back room of a Wonchester baker's. For the moment they were free of their companion and guide, Inspector Curphy.

"Yes, Clinton, but first I want to see where Perry was found."

Clinton crumbled his bread.

"Think Dawton did it?"

"There's evidence enough to hang him—too much." Clinton looked up. Something in Slade's tone was arresting. "And there's one point I must settle in my mind before I do anything."

"What's that?" ventured Clinton.

"How far up the shaft does the bloodstain extend?"

Clinton referred to his notebook.

"Two inches—exactly."

"And how long is the head?"

"An inch and a quarter."

"Making three and a quarter inches, eh, Clinton?"

"Yes.". Clinton shut his notebook and returned it to his pocket. Slowly he returned to his food. "I don't see——"

"It's obvious," said Slade. "Jenkinson probed that wound and found it to be a full three and a half inches—a quarter of an inch deeper, in fact, than the arrow entered Perry's body. Doesn't that strike you as strange, Clinton?"

Slade smiled as he saw comprehension dawn on his assistant's face.

"You mean Perry was killed not with the arrow, but with another weapon, and then the arrow... afterwards—"

"Yes, that's how I see it," said Slade, "afterwards."

Clinton recalled another detail of the police report on the evidence.

"There's Perry's wrist-watch," he pointed out. "Smashed when he fell."

"You think that gives us the time, Clinton? I don't think so. Perry fell in long grass. He wasn't carried there, because he bled considerably, and Curphy says there are no blood trails leading away from the spot. But falling in long grass might break a watch-glass, hardly the works of a solid metal timepiece like Perry's."

"You think the watch was—fixed?"

Slade nodded.

"It's an idea I'm not forgetting to look over, Clinton. It fits with the arrow-after-death theory. And the whole purpose of this dramatic killing obviously is to entangle Philip Dawton and to give some one else an alibi."

Curphy accompanied them to the scene of the crime. Slade walked through the beeches, stared at the targets in the grounds of the Hall, and came back to where Clinton stood. His face was thoughtful.

"You say, Curphy, Alice Perry tells you her father came to meet some one?"

"So she says. She doesn't know who. Perry was a close 'un when he liked. I think he had reason to be."

"Did he favour any suitor for his daughter?"

"Well"—Curphy scrubbed his chin with the flat of his hand—"I've heard Mr. Radd's keen on her. And I think Perry borrowed some money from him. Of course, this is only local gossip, you know."

"Illuminating, all the same. Let's walk over to Moon Farm."

"But Stephen Radd's away."

"All the more reason for paying a visit now," returned Slade.

"But——" Curphy closed his mouth abruptly, contenting himself with a heavy frown.

"Bunnyman said he came over to see the stallion Rufus, didn't he?" said Slade. "They spent quite a while there, talking about his points and the coming show. That right?"

"Yes," nodded Curphy.

"If you'll compare times," resumed Slade, "I think you'll find the time Perry's watch stopped was when Radd and Bunnyman were in the stable. It was beginning to get dark, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Curphy again.

Slade spent some time walking across the Long Paddock, sauntering outside the stable and nosing in the stalls, much to the disgust of a muttering stable-hand. He stood watching the stallion for some moments, then closed the stable door. When he opened it again Clinton observed a piece of mired straw adhering to his chief's elbow.

Conversation dwindled on the return to Wonchester. The hall where the inquest was held was thronged with people drawn from many miles around. The procedure dragged into a tiring recital of facts and suppositions, and the coroner—a Wonchester solicitor—did his best to keep the foreman of the jury from wasting too much time. Philip Dawton, white and strained-looking, went through a grilling mill. There were harsh murmurings in the well of the court when he left the witness-stand.

Despite the coroner's injunction regarding the purpose of the inquiry, the jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against Philip Dawton. The coroner over-ruled it, amending it to murder against some person or persons unknown. At least, everyone was satisfied that murder had been committed.

Philip Dawton did not leave the hall by the front entrance, where demonstrance was staged against his exit; he left by a small rear entrance—in company with Curphy.

Slade and Clinton hastened to the police station, to find that Curphy and his charge had arrived before them, and so had someone else—Alice Perry. Her face was flushed, her large eyes very bright.

"I know you didn't do it, Phil," she said. "I'll never believe you did... and I love you, Phil."

Philip Dawton smiled tensely. He did not speak, but his shoulders straightened.

"Miss Perry," said Slade, after he had been introduced to the girl, "I should like to ask you a question. Did Stephen Radd ever ask you to marry him?"

"Why—yes. I told him I couldn't. I didn't love him. I liked him, of course. He's very nice, and a gentleman, too, but you see I couldn't when..."

She paused, embarrassed. Slade nodded.

"I understand," he said. "Was he very disappointed?"

"He tried not to show it," she said wistfully.

"Was this some time ago?"

"Nearly two months."

Half an hour later Slade and Clinton stood facing a somewhat hostile Curphy.

"But I can't do such a thing," the local inspector expostulated. "I haven't anything to go on. I can't play a practical joke on a man of Stephen Radd's standing——"

"This isn't a joke, Curphy," Slade said, with a touch of asperity. "It's a means to justice."

The local man fingered his collar.

"But I must have a reason. Confound it, I can't get one of Radd's stablemen to put a bandage round the animal's fetlock and tell him that tale without something to go on! If you wish to, that's your business, of course."

"No, Curphy. I must have your co-operation here. You know what local country people are. You'll get a better job done than I shall. As for reasons, I'll give you two. One, that arrow, if it had been fired from the grounds of Dawton Hall, should have impaled Perry's body. It didn't. It merely entered it—and not as deeply as the wound is. Measure, see for yourself. Reason number two, the top of the arrow is ruffled. Did you notice? As though someone had hit it with something, to make sure it would be driven home. Of course, Dawton is tricked by circumstance. He hasn't an alibi. He was somewhere in the grounds, and can't prove it. Well?"

Curphy looked uncomfortable.

"It's no good trying to fix this murder on someone other than Dawton unless you can produce the weapon." He seemed dogged on the point, and secretly Slade approved the local man's obdurateness.

"I'll do better than that, Curphy, if I'm not wrong. I'll make the murderer produce the weapon himself."

Curphy stared, first at Slade, then at Clinton, but the latter's face told him nothing. The sergeant was accus-

tomed to Slade's spectacular way of completing his cases.

"Radd?" he queried. Then, as he received no answer save an encouraging smile, he shook his shoulders. "All right. I'll fix it."

A couple of hours later a bemused stableman walked up to the Moon Farmhouse. In a short while he returned with his master. The two went into the stable, and after an interval Radd came out and returned to the farmhouse. The stableman hung about, and when his master had disappeared came to where the two Yard men and Curphy were concealed.

"Did he remove the bandage from the fetlock?" asked Slade.

"No," said the man. "I'd got it smeared in ointment. But I'll have a job explaining tomorrow. He said he'd have the vet. in from Wonchester. That stallion's bloodstock, and he won't——"

"You won't have to explain," said Slade. "We'll do all that is necessary."

The man went away, shaking his head in doubt.

"I don't get this," grunted Curphy. "You saw Radd. What are you going to do now?"

"Wait," Slade replied. "It'll be dark in another half an hour."

The half-hour passed slowly to the three men in hiding, but as the light faded from the sky a man could be seen walking towards the stables. It was too dark for his features to be distinguished from where the watchers waited. The man paused at the stable door, glanced round furtively, then went inside.

"Now," muttered Slade.

The three policemen ran forward. Slade, the first to reach the door, opened it slowly, but the hinges were rusty and creaked. The man inside rose from the floor, and the interior of the stable was lit with a wildly-swinging torch-ray. Slade jumped inside. Someone swore, and met the Yard man with a swinging blow. There was a short, heavy struggle in the darkness of the stable, while the torch burned at the feet of the straining men, and the stallion whinnied with fright. It was Clinton who finally snapped on the handcuffs, and Curphy, perspiring and wiping blood from a torn wrist, picked up the torch.

He shone it full in the baffled, scowling face of . . . Bunnyman.

"Good God!" he gasped in surprise.

"Bunnyman," said Slade, "I arrest you for the murder of Matthew Perry, and anything you say . . ."

He repeated the old formula which is balm to every British detective, because it means the end of a battle of wits—sometimes of more than wits.

Slade took the torch and searched the floor. He picked up something that resembled nothing so much as a long six-inch spike driven in a rough wooden handle.

"The weapon, Curphy," he explained. "It looks like the prong of a pitchfork. Ingenious, Bunnyman. Wouldn't make a hole larger round than an arrow shaft."

Footsteps approached, and in the doorway stood Stephen Radd.

"What on earth's the matter?" he began. "Who—— Why, Inspector Curphy, and, yes, Superintendent Slade." The torch-ray flickered over the handcuffs on the farmer's wrists. "Heavens, what has Bunnyman done? You don't mean——"

"Yes," said Slade. "We do—Bunnyman murdered Matthew Perry. It was an ingenious plot. He arranged to meet Perry where he killed him. Previously he had stolen one of Philip Dawton's arrows. That wasn't difficult, I imagine. It was easy to lie in that beech plantation and steal one that went astray. Further, lying there gave him a good idea how far those arrows carried. Having killed him, he pushed the arrow in the wound—but not quite far enough. Still, it wasn't easy. Air got in the wound, and he had to hit the top of the arrow, probably with this." The Yard man held up the implement of death. "That spoiled the feathers. I noticed that when I saw the arrow. But he had to secure an alibi. He smashed Perry's watch, placed the hands nearly an hour on, then called on you, Mr. Radd. He concealed the weapon here. A good place, I must admit. He drove the prong into the earth flooring and concealed the wooden handle, holding his fingerprints, with straw. No one would think of searching the floor of your stallion's stall. I shouldn't have thought of it only I couldn't understand quite why Bunnyman had visited you on foot, when he had a trap. Obviously, he had meant to lead you to the body. Because he hadn't his trap it gave him an excuse to cut across the Long Paddock and go home by the lane; that cut off a good bit—and incidentally finding the body early enabled him to come out with his pat alibi. Had the case not worked out, you, Mr. Radd, would have been the second suspect—as"—with a glance at Curphy—"I think you were.

"I heard Bunnyman tell you this morning, Mr. Radd,"

went on Slade, "that he would drop in this evening. I imagined he would wish to recover this"—Slade again held up the weapon — "but I didn't leave that to chance. I arranged for one of your stable-hands to tell you, in Bunnyman's presence, that the stallion had cut his fetlock on something sharp. I guessed then that Bunnyman would be alarmed and come to look for the weapon he had concealed."

"But good heavens! What was his motive for the crime?"

Bunnyman still remained silent.

"I think you'll find it's money," said Slade. "I noticed him talking to the coroner before the inquest this afternoon, and he showed him some papers. The coroner is a solicitor. Perhaps a mortgage which he couldn't pay——"

Curphy grunted.

"That reminds me," he interrupted. "There is a mortgage on Bunnyman's farm. I remember now, but I don't know who holds it."

"I can only guess," said Slade. "Perry. He borrowed from you, Mr. Radd, and took the mortgage on the farm. Perry wasn't popular, I gather, and you were pressing him for his money——"

"I wasn't, Superintendent."

"That doesn't matter, Mr. Radd. Popular gossip had it that you were—after his daughter had turned you down. At least, if I know anything about gossip—that's what it said."

"I see," said Stephen Radd quietly.

"Bunnyman heard the story, became afraid for his farm, as he was breeding bloodstock——"

"That's right. He came over about my stallion Rufus."

"Killing two birds with one stone. But he didn't want Perry to foreclose in order to pay what he owed you, Mr. Radd. Am I right, Bunnyman?"

"Find out," snapped the farmer, in a surly tone.

If it was a challenge it was one Slade took up. Two days sufficed for him to get sufficient material to buttress his theory. The motive was clear. For the rest, the fingerprints on the handle of Bunnyman's impromptu but ingenious weapon decided the farmer's fate.

And when, several months afterwards, Alice Perry became the local Squire's lady, Stephen Radd tore up her father's receipts of moneys loaned. But Philip Dawton discovered that he could make a gesture equally generous. When at the auction of Bunnyman's lands they were added to the Dawton estate the Squire decided that a gentleman farmer's industry would not be spoiled by the addition of another thirty acres.

THEY CAME TO KILL

AS GLADYS MERVYN closed the door of her father's bedroom, there were tears on her dark lashes. She crossed to the stair-landing, and Wilkins, the family's old butler, met her.

"Mr. Stone is in the sun-room, Miss Gladys," he announced.

"Thank you, Wilkins."

She hurried to where Peter Stone was impatiently pacing a patch of sunlight. He had a newspaper tucked under his arm, and his face was knotted in a frown. As he saw the girl coming towards him through the wide-flung doors the frown lifted for a moment, replaced by an expression of eager tenderness, but instantly it returned.

"Peter!" she exclaimed. "What brings you so early?"

The young man took the newspaper in his left hand, was about to speak, then thought of something other than the trouble in his own mind.

"How is your father this morning, Gladys?"

Her pretty mouth drooped.

"Not so well, Peter. He's taking things badly. He knows he is helpless. Vincent Taggart has him by the throat. He can ruin him by one stroke of a pen... and Vincent Taggart is a snake... he's merciless." Her lips tautened, and her voice became a little husky. She looked at Peter with very bright eyes, so that he longed to kiss them. They were very much in love with each other. "Dr.

[enderson said last night that father is not fighting. That's ne trouble, I'm afraid, Peter. He's given up hope."

Peter Stone's hands clenched.

"Gladys," he said slowly, "that swine Taggart's played is dirty games too long. But this time he's not getting way with it. He's all but ruined your father financially. le's not going to——"

He gulped. He could not put his thought into words. nstead, he held out the paper.

"Take a look at that, Gladys."

Gladys Mervyn stared wonderingly at a composite photograph of herself and Vincent Taggart. On the face of the inancier whose meteoric rise to success, and whose achievement of vast money power, had been a topic for national liscussion for several weeks, was an expression of gloating pleasure. It was not a pleasant face, neither young nor old, definitely saturnine, slightly sardonic. The caption below the photograph caused the girl to catch her breath. It read: "Shall we be announcing their engagement shortly?"

Peter took the newspaper from her.

"Taggart's work. By heaven, he's hand[illegible] cleverly, but this time he's hit the wrong nail on the head. We love each other, Gladys, and before I'll stand by and see you sacrifice yourself to a——" He swallowed hard. "I—I told him I'd call on him and when. He's expecting me today."

They were very still, only their eyes telling what was in their hearts. Peter Stone turned swiftly and went out. The girl whom he loved above all else in the world dropped into a chair, her face very white, very stiff.

It was possibly an hour later that two men were bending over a letter in the office of the Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard.

"What do you make of it, Slade?" asked the A.C.

Superintendent Anthony Slade of the C.I.D. (X2) straightened his back.

"Well, sir, Taggart wants protection from us. That's plain. He thinks he may need it."

The A.C. nodded ponderously.

"Taggart's very clever. We haven't been able to catch him yet, Slade. He's got away with everything and thumbed

his nose at us. This"—the A.C. tapped the letter—"is another piece of cleverness, but I can't see exactly how. Can you?"

"You saw the photograph in the morning's papers, sir?"

"I did. What of it?"

"I understand he's driving the Mervyns to the wall. There are a number of people who would regret the ruin of George Mervyn, and I believe the daughter was practically engaged to young Stone—the son of Kenya Stone—before Taggart smashed Mervyn stock."

The A.C. glanced searchingly at Slade.

"You think, then——"

He paused interrogatingly. The detective shrugged.

"Thinking is a waste of time, sir, when dealing with a man of Taggart's kidney. One's got to know."

Slade's chief nodded. "You're right, Slade ... dead right. Well, if he wants protection, give it to him. But"—the glances of the two men met and each understood the other perfectly—"take every precaution. We don't want to be caught in any back-wash."

Vincent Taggart was not a superstitious man. If that morning his ears tingled, he did not think anyone was talking about him. He knew that practically every hour of the day people talked about him. The knowledge afforded him pleasure. Those people had reason to talk about him. In the space of a brief eighteen months he had entered the cage of the lions of the City, and come back with the largest share of the spoils.

He glanced at the newspaper propped on the desk of his study, and smiled. He had never desired anything in his life so much as Gladys Mervyn. In her he saw perfection. And now that perfection was within his grasp. True, there was Stone, hot-headed, very young, and... But Vincent Taggart had seen much of the world. He had taken care of Peter Stone.

There was a tap on the door, and Samuel Bates entered. The two had seen much of life together; they shared more than a few secrets. Like master like man is a saying not always true; but it was true enough in the case of Taggart and his long-jawed henchman. Bates was one of those men who never wither because they never bloom. It was impossible to tell his age from a glance at the man.

"Sam," said Taggart, "I'm expecting some policemen here today." Momentarily Bates' eyes narrowed. "Just a precaution on my part—one that will pay."

Taggart laughed, and glanced through the open French doors to the riotous colour of his Surrey garden. Bates collected the glasses and empty bottle for which he had come, and retired soundlessly. He knew Taggart was clever, but the police were not fools. Sam Bates entertained a robust respect for them. He made a point of keeping near the hall extension of the 'phone, and that was how he came to know when Taggart received a call. Sam, with all his North Country caution to the fore, listened in. What he heard roused a feeling that had lain dormant for years.

Taggart himself was not pleased to receive that call. The speaker's voice was low and husky, and she called Taggart "Vince."

"I wasn't dreaming when I opened the paper, was I, Vince?" she asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about," snapped Taggart irritably.

"Like hell you don't Listen, my friend, you've picked the wrong tree to bark up. That Mervyn girl's nothing to you, and never will be. And I'm not bluffing."

Taggart laughed on a note that stabbed the other.

"No? Perhaps somebody else has got the wrong dog by the tail."

"You're not doing this to me, Vince, and getting away with it."

"No?" Again that mocking laugh. "And how will you stop me?"

"Too damned effectively for you to know about it!"

The 'phone went dead.

Taggart dropped the receiver into its cradle and pursed his thin lips. A show of anger was to be expected, after all, he told himself. Downstairs Sam Bates gnawed his lip and padded into the kitchen.

A couple of hours later a police car drew into the drive of Taggart's house, and Slade, accompanied by his chief assistant, Sergeant Clinton, alighted. Taggart raised his brows when his offer of refreshment was politely refused, and came direct to the point.

"I'm expecting a threatening visit," he explained to Slade. "I prefer the police to take action *before* I am attacked, Superintendent."

Slade and Clinton found they had been assigned a dreary waiting job. As a matter of fact, the period of waiting was prolonged because Peter Stone took the precaution of leaving his car in a country side-lane. He thought his subsequent approach to the house unobserved; certainly, when he appeared at the open French windows, Vincent Taggart gave a credible performance of a surprised man. Stone was flushed. The interval between his leaving the girl he loved, and arriving at Taggart's house, had but served to inflame his anger against the other.

"Taggart," he said, "I've come to tell you something you'd better not forget. Leave Gladys Mervyn out of your dirty scheming. I saw what you had printed in the newspapers this morning. You thought there would be no kick coming. You've got her father beat. All right. But I'm standing up to you, you swine, and I'll give you the thrashing of your life if you——"

Peter paused. The words had tumbled from him. He was breathless.

In his knowledge, Vincent Taggart smiled.

"If I——?"

His pause was a question-mark. The smirking face was too much for the seething young man. He sprang forward, took Taggart unawares, and drove a straight right to his jaw. The financier, who had risen from his chair as danger approached, fell sprawling. As he hit the floor he yelled.

With obvious distaste for their task, Slade and Clinton appeared on the scene and grappled with the angry young man.

"All right, all right," Peter muttered. "I might have guessed he'd pull something like this. Let me get out of here."

Vincent Taggart climbed to his feet, straightened his ruffled clothes, and reseated himself in his chair, with his back to the others. He was too angry to trust himself to speak... before a couple of plain-clothes men. He sat with the sunlight from the open French windows streaming over his face and shoulders.

Slade and Clinton walked towards the hall with their charge.

"You've put yourself in a difficult position," said Slade.

"My God, I'd have liked to——"

Peter's wrathful utterance was interrupted by the savage bark of a revolver shot.

"Quick, Clinton—back!" Slade cried.

The two Yard men, leaving Peter to follow, dashed back along the corridor towards the room where they had left Vincent Taggart. The door was open, and just inside the room stood Sam Bates, a smoking gun in his right hand. In the man's face was a dazed look. Clinton gripped him, and Slade seized his gun.

"All right," said Bates, "I did it. He had it coming to him . . . I reckon."

He was staring in fascinated fixity at the slumped body of Vincent Taggart, hands outstretched across his desk, head dropped on them.

Slade crossed to the body. Taggart was dead. A second glance was barely necessary. The detective came back to Bates.

Slade smiled grimly.

"So you shot him, Bates?"

"Yes," mumbled the man.

"You stood in that doorway, behind him, Bates, and with a gun fitted with a silencer shot a bullet into his chest—a shot we all heard!"

Bates was silent. Slade went back to the body, lifted the trunk gently, and allowed Bates to see the blood soaking into the blotting-pad. Without a word the Yard man lowered the body, measured a distance from the door with his eye, and began searching the wall panelling. At last he found what he sought. He took out a pen-knife and dug a bullet from the woodwork of the wall. He brought it back to Bates.

"This is your slug, Bates. You couldn't have been thinking so fast to have made up such a damned poor story. Who are you shielding?"

Bates' face became haggard.

"No one . . . I shot him. You can say I didn't. But if I say I did——"

"Then you're lying. That's all there is to it." Slade's manner became more firm. "Did you see who shot him? If you did——"

He stopped. He could see from Bates' manner that the man would not talk . . . yet.

The door opened again, and Peter Stone pushed his head inside the room. He saw the body, the gun in Slade's hand, and Clinton's grip on Bates. He walked across to Taggart's body, pushed out a hand to touch the dead head, then drew it back swiftly, and laughed.

It was not a laugh of mirth. It was a verbal release of pent-up emotion.

Suddenly the young man was quiet.

"So you shot him," he said wonderingly to Bates, who did not reply. "Well, congratulations, you've ridden the world of its prize swine."

Stone turned to the Yard man.

"If you'd searched me you would have found this," he said, taking a gun from his pocket. "I brought it along to emphasize what I had to say. I thought I knew Taggart's breed... But you didn't give me a chance."

Slade took the gun, tossed it on the table without a glance.

"Is it loaded?" he inquired.

The young man blushed.

"No, I said I only brought it to—well, bluff with. You see, I——"

He gulped.

"All right, Mr. Stone. I don't think I need keep you any longer."

Peter Stone stared from Clinton to Slade, glanced once at the slumped body, then went out the way he had come—through the French windows. He walked quickly out of the garden, along the road, until he came to the side-lane where his car was parked. His eyes widened in surprise. A man was in the act of clambering into the driving-seat.

"Hey!" Peter cried.

He sprinted. The man in the car had a cap pulled low over his face, and his clothes were badly cut, so that they hung in slack folds round his body. As Peter drew level the other struck out with a fist. It was a glancing blow that took Peter unawares, bemused him for the moment, but did not hurt him.

He turned about and jumped the other, who turned lithely to one side. The opposed bodies met, tottered, and in a thrashing knot burst through a door of the car and crashed into the road.

"Now, by heck, I'll teach you to pinch someone else's car!" Peter growled, rising and yanking the other to his feet.

He drew back his hand for a smashing blow as the other's cap fell off, releasing a crop of blonde curls.

"Great dog!" muttered Peter, his hand falling to his side. "Who are you? Why the fancy dress? If this is a joke I——"

"Save your breath," snapped the woman, her eyes blazing, "this isn't my idea of a joke, so we agree on that point. I want us to agree on another point. I'm going to take your car. All right?"

Peter bridled.

"I'm dashed if it is! I don't mind doing the chivalrous by a damsel in distress, but you're not——"

"A damsel in distress?" she sneered. "Right. But I'm taking your car, see? Know why? Because I'm keeping out of distress. Just that."

She pushed past Peter and got into the car. Peter recovered himself with a start. This bewildering person left him running to keep up. He sprang to the running-board.

"How did you get here?" he asked. It was the first question that came to his mind.

She regarded him with a hint of amusement in her eyes. They were lively black eyes that belied the very narrow lips.

"By train," she replied. "However, I have very special reasons for using your car to return by. Now be a good fellow and get out of my way."

Ignoring Peter's protest, she whirred the self-starter, eased the choke. She was about to put the car in gear when Peter pulled open the door.

"Very well, I'll be a passenger," he told her, "but the first policeman I meet——"

He paused abruptly, catching his breath. A gun had appeared in the woman's hand.

"A pity," she murmured.

Lightly she leaped up and crashed the heavy barrel against the side of Peter's head. He fell over backward, and lay still, a trickle of blood seeping down from his cut temple.

"A pity," she repeated to herself, then sat down and put the car in motion. The car pursued its way along little-frequented country lanes, slowly drawing nearer and nearer to the Metropolis.

Meanwhile Bates was remaining impassive in the room

where Vincent Taggart sprawled in death. All of Slade's questions elicited no response. Clinton had no more success.

"Very well," said Slade at length, "you've forced me to take another route, Bates. And you haven't helped your daughter a scrap. We'll pick her up soon."

Bates drew breath sharply.

"My God, how did you——?"

He bit his lip as he made the half-admission.

Slade appeared not to notice.

"As soon as Taggart's letter was received, this telephone line was covered. We got the message he received this morning, and traced the call to an apartment house used by people in the theatrical profession. We found that Linda Bowman, who used the 'phone at the time, was really Lily Bates. A call to a theatrical agency fixed that. The whole thing was settled in half an hour. And Lily Bates had apparently known Vincent Taggart very well——"

"I meant to've done him in myself!" Bates cried, trying to rise, but being forced down again by Clinton's heavy hand. "Honest I did! I didn't know... him and *her*. God, I'd have——"

"She's your daughter, Bates, but I believe she's tough. She pulled the wool over your eyes. We've had Taggart under survey for some time. We know who he's been keeping and paying bills for. You'd better tell us what you know."

Bates shook his head.

"I tell you I didn't suspect a thing till I heard her myself this morning. I tell you I didn't——"

Slade tapped his arm.

"All right. That'll be enough in that strain."

"You'll never get her!" shouted Bates. "She'll fool you. She's clever——"

He shut his mouth savagely as Peter Stone reappeared through the door.

"Well?" asked Slade.

"A man—I thought he was a man, anyway; actually it was a woman in disguise—hit me over the head with a gun and drove away in my car. I say, I——"

Peter broke off as Bates dropped his head in his hands.

"Have I said something—I mean..."

He floundered to another pause.

"You've said plenty, Mr. Stone," said Slade grimly. "What's the number of your car?"

Peter told him.

Slade picked up the 'phone and gave a number. "I want a message radioed to all Squad cars," he said.

When he dropped the receiver into its cradle he felt in his pocket for his pipe.

"I'll give you a lift back, Mr. Stone," he said. "You arrived in time to make a killing... metaphorically, of course," he added, as he saw the blank look on the young man's face.

THE BOGUS ARTIST

"HE'S DEAD—with a bullet in his brain!"

The white-faced announcer of this news stared across the polished bar of The Cornish Miner. The landlord, Jim Penworth, followed the other's gaze, and thoughtfully drew a tankard of foaming ale.

"Now, Tom, if you'll forget to be excited and just explain," he said, leaning across the bar. "Who's dead? Who's got a bullet in his brain?"

"The artist feller." Tom Darch wiped his wet mouth on the sleeve of his Navy-blue jersey. "They're bringing him in. He's dead all right. I seen 'im. An' it's murder, Jim: Gawd! a murder right here in Bellumport."

The enormity of the fact required another copious draught from the rapidly emptying tankard. Tom Darch's face was hidden in the pewter cylinder as Jim Penworth walked to the door of his establishment and stared up the main street of Bellumport, the small Cornish village nestling between high, craggy headlands against which a furious sea broke its might.

Down the street came a straggling group of men, bearing in their midst something on an old door. Only the two feet protruding incongruously from under the flapping overcoat told an onlooker that the body of a man was stretched on the rude ambulance.

The party of men with their burden stopped at the door of The Cornish Miner.

"Sad news, Jim," said the leader, a man with a nutbrown face dressed in a police constable's uniform.

"I've heard," nodded Penworth. "Tom Darch made sure of another pint by getting in first." The landlord's face was expressionless as he stared at the overcoat draping the dead body of his best-paying guest. "Bring him up to his room. It's paid for till the end of the week."

The group of bare-headed Cornishmen carried the body of the man known as John Carruthers to the room he had occupied at The Cornish Miner.

Twenty-four hours later an official request was made to the Commissioner of Police, New Scotland Yard, and the case of what the Press had already dubbed the Mystery of the Murdered Artist was handed to Department X2 of the C.I.D.

Superintendent Anthony Slade, chief of that department, accompanied by his assistant, Sergeant Clinton, arrived in Bellumport on a day of gusty showers, with wind-whipped cloud scudding across the brooding face of a dark sea and white-capped breakers bursting against the rugged ramparts that protected and enclosed the Cornish village.

Slade found Superintendent Vinson of Truro at the inn. The local superintendent was a man of action.

"Glad to have you with us, Superintendent," he informed Slade, when introductions were over, "especially as there's one item of interest that's just come up—I mean, an item that gives one to wonder much about Mr. Carruthers?"

"You've found out he was a crook?"

The local superintendent shook his head.

"It's more intriguing than that, Slade. He wasn't an artist. He was bogus!"

The two Yard men stared.

"A bogus artist," repeated Slade slowly. "You have good proof, of course."

"The best. A friend of mine is art editor of *The West Countryman*. He came along with me yesterday, and when he saw Carruther's efforts on canvas he declared at once that the man was not an artist—not even the veriest amateur. He was just splashing colour on canvas, crude greens for sea, dirty blues for sky, and some smudges for rocks. Sort of stuff my boy of six does, only not so good. I'll show you."

He produced about half a dozen canvases. Slade, who was no art critic, could see that they were mere daubs.

"Got any idea what it means?" he asked Vinson.

"Not the remotest. I don't want to hand you the dirty end of the stick, Slade"—the Truro man grinned—"but this is now a Yard job. It's going to be up to you. Any co-operation I can give I will willingly. But—well, good luck. It's a puzzle I shouldn't like to tackle alone, I don't mind admitting."

For a day the two Yard men spent their time collating local stories of the dead man. John Carruthers had come to Bellumport two months before. He had taken a room at The Cornish Miner, but had not mixed with the villagers. In fact, he had been rather distant in his manner. He had told Jim Penworth that he was desirous of making some paintings of night-scenes off the two large headlands frowning over the village. With this explanation, the landlord had not considered it strange that Carruthers should go out with his easel and canvas of an evening and not return to the inn until early morning.

"How frequently did he go out in that way?" Slade inquired.

"About three evenings a week. Yes, I should say that's a fair average," the landlord replied.

"You know, Clinton," Slade told his assistant, "Carruthers was playing a double game. He was not an artist, but an artist in this part of the world is taken for granted and allowed to roam more or less where he likes. So he posed as an artist. We've got to find out what he was after—or who?" he added slowly.

"That means starting from the place where they found the body."

"Yes, but we'll see the body itself first. The doctor says there's nothing unusual. A thirty-two bullet entered the head at the base of the skull, suggesting that someone sneaked up on him from behind. But that's no clue, and the Cornish police have already tried out his fingerprints. He's not known at the Yard."

They viewed the body, that of a man of about thirty-five, hard-faced, of dark colouring. Slade went over the man's clothes. Money, pen, wallet, keys—they told him nothing. He had not even a cheque-book on a bank that could be approached. No letters, no visiting-cards.

"A complete blank," was Clinton's verdict of the visit.

Slade did not reply until they were alone. He lit his pipe reflectively.

"Not a *complete* blank, Clinton," he said.

The sergeant glanced sharply at his chief. There was an undercurrent in Slade's voice which was familiar to his ear. Slade was thinking along a definite line; something had arrested his attention.

"Then I missed it," he confessed frankly.

"Adhering to the legs on the easel are a few particles of reddish clay, Clinton."

"I saw that," said the sergeant.

"Similar bits of reddish clay have become stuck in the welts of Carruthers' shoes."

"I saw that too," said Clinton.

Slade nodded.

"But where in this neighbourhood can you see the natural red clay? Tell me that, Clinton."

The sergeant's eyes narrowed.

"I follow. Yes, I missed that. You mean, there isn't any red clay near the village?"

"The only outcrop of red sandstone along this stretch of coast, Clinton, for a good few miles, is over by Bellum Gap. Get the point?"

Clinton frowned.

"No, unless you mean that Carruthers must have been over at the Gap."

"That only goes half-way, Clinton. Listen, Carruther must have been over at the Gap—true. But his body wa found near the gorse-bushes at the top of Smuggler's Poin The cliff at the top of Smuggler's Point is very chalky. Bu there is no chalk-dust on Carruthers' shoes, in his turn-up or on his hat—in short, in the places where chalk-dus would be blown by a breeze. And it's breezy enough u that cliff. The only chalk-dust on his clothes marks wher he was found lying—on his stomach. Now do you see wha I'm driving at?"

Clinton's face remained set in a fixed expression o thought for a full minute before it lightened.

"Yes, of course, I see now!" he exclaimed. "Carruther didn't walk to the place where he was found. He woul have had to walk in the teeth of a wind, and the chalk-dus

would have been blown into his turn-ups and over his hat. But that means——"

He stopped, staring at Slade.

The latter nodded.

"Precisely, Clinton. It means that Carruthers' body was carried to the place where it was found. I should say, with the little we have to go upon, that it was carried *from* the region of the Gap. That too tells me something."

Clinton waited, and Slade, after relighting his pipe, resumed.

"Bellum Gap is an inlet, which at high tide is almost a miniature river. There is only one house in the Gap, a place called Stone Tor, the home of a recluse named Jenkinson. Vinson said the man is practically unknown to the locals. Now, it seems to me Carruthers took a great deal of interest in the Gap—probably in Stone Tor, because, as he wasn't a genuine artist, we can argue that he was interested in people or a person rather than in places or a place. That so, he was spying on Stone Tor."

"Isn't that guessing?" queried Clinton. The dour-faced Yard sergeant was one of those practical-minded individuals who are the best brakes for the mentally active. Slade found his sergeant's constant feet-on-the-ground attitude a splendid stimulation. He knew that when he could satisfy Clinton's practical outlook he could make out a case that would convince a jury.

"No, not guessing, Clinton," he replied slowly. "Carruthers brought out his easel, set up his canvas, and made a show of painting. Well, what is one of the main features of his night-scenes, apart from the terrible painting? Something noticeable about all of them."

This time Clinton was not lagging behind.

"There's not a moon shown in any one of them."

Slade grinned.

"Right, Clinton, and that's damned important. Carruthers was no fool, bet your boots on that. A fool talks; Carruthers didn't. He knew that he would have to show his canvases to Penworth, and Penworth would have said something if he'd seen a moon in a picture of a moonless night. The nights when there was a moon Carruthers didn't pretend to paint because he didn't wish to be seen too far afield. But from all this we've reason to suppose his

chief interest lay in Stone Tor. All right, we'll see for ourselves."

They returned to The Cornish Miner, partook of an excellent meal prepared by Jim Penworth's buxom wife, and set out for Bellum Gap, some three miles away.

A heavy sea was flowing, and the wind lashed the crests of the waves to creamy foam.

"It's a wild coast," Clinton grunted, holding on to his hat as the two men crested the cliff above Smuggler's Point and struck along the narrow chalky trail towards the Gap.

"It's bred wild men in the past, Clinton," said Slade. "The old-time Cornish wreckers were pretty savage."

They passed the spot where Carruthers' body had been found, and in the teeth of the westerly wind pushed forward. Spray from the torment of waters stung their faces, sea-brine coated their lips.

However, in the Gap was shelter. The tide was coming in, and as the afternoon faded the white gulls flew screaming inland, diving and beating frantic wings.

"There's a storm brewing, Clinton. Let's move farther up the Gap."

A cliff-path led them under the lee of Stone Tor. It was a high, grey-stone house perched on the cliff-top like a grey sentinel. Already lights gleamed in several of the downstairs windows.

"Look," said Clinton, "there's a stairway cut in the face of the cliff."

In the descending gloom they could just make out the pale rises of those stone steps in the cliff-face on the far side of the Gap. Slade nodded thoughtfully. At the base of the cliff was a black patch, probably a cave. At high tide such a cave would be flooded. At low tide it would be still inaccessible from the land unless one cut across the ground of Stone Tor; from the sea there would be a wide stretch of sandy flats, with the Atlantic Ocean bridging the mouth.

If the cave were large enough it could conceal...

Slade turned abruptly to Clinton.

"I'm going back," he said. "I've got an idea. Now, listen carefully."

Five minutes later Slade started his lonesome return to Bellumport. With the wind behind him, he was fairly bowled along the hill-top. He arrived at the inn within forty-five minutes of leaving Clinton.

"I want to use your 'phone, landlord," he told Penworth.

"Very good, Superintendent."

Slade got through to Superintendent Vinson, and the local man smothered an oath when he heard what Slade wanted.

"A coastguard cutter? Good Lord, man! Unless it's really urgent——"

"It's desperately urgent," said Slade in measured tones. "Tonight will be rough, and there'll be no moon."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"There was no moon in Carruthers' pictures."

"Carruthers' pictures! The man was a fake. He didn't know the first thing about brushwork!"

But in the end Slade got what he wanted. Vinson promised to 'phone the nearest coastguard cutter in harbour. He thought Slade could be picked up in under an hour—with luck.

He emphasized the last, without real need, for it chanced that a radio call from Falmouth ordered a coastguard cutter standing off the heads of Bellumport to put in to land. Fifty minutes after putting down Penworth's receiver Slade was shaking the hands of a seaman with a booming voice. He was taken aboard the cutter, and in the small cabin the Yard man outlined what was in his mind.

The coastguard officer's eyes opened.

"You've probably hit on the very explanation of those blue lights," he said.

"So you have noticed something unusual?" queried Slade eagerly.

"Yes, that's why we were standing off Bellumport. We have observed the blue-light signals, but haven't been able to run down any craft. Just the blue lights, then blackness. Always when there is no moon, too. And, of course, along this coast it is pretty difficult to judge just where a craft *might* be."

Slade packed his pipe and accepted a match from the coastguard officer.

"You can take up a position off Bellum Gap?"

"Certainly."

"And how far can you creep in at high tide?"

The man consulted a chart.

"About fifty yards, I should say."

Slade made a rough reckoning in his mind.

"All right. Now listen to what I've got in mind."

The coastguard officer listened with growing bewilderment. He sat silent for some moments when the Yard man had finished.

On the low-running path of the cliff, huddled in the lee of a large natural buttress, Clinton waited patiently, saw stars appear and be blotted out by scudding cloud, and every now and again his hand wandered to the right pocket of his overcoat and to the cool butt of the automatic Slade had left with him.

Slade's instructions had been precise.

It was past half-past eight by Clinton's wrist-watch, and the wind was moaning fitfully across the wide mouth of the Gap, when he saw a blue light out at sea. A flash, another flash, and then darkness again and the booming of the foam-crested waves. Suddenly Clinton was aware that every light had gone out in the house called Stone Tor. Five minutes passed and then he heard a noise that was unmistakable—the plopping of a petrol engine's exhaust.

From the opposite side of the Gap a motor-boat nosed her way out into the full tide running in the Gap.

Slowly the minutes drifted by—twenty . . . thirty . . . half an hour.

Had Slade been too late, or had . . .

From out at sea came the sound of small-arm firing. A searchlight swept the scene, and Clinton, screwing up his eyes against the whipping sting of the wind, made out a dark shape disappearing out to sea, while another was running straight for the shore, with a third boat in pursuit.

The searchlight swung round, lit the rumbling waters stretching to the Gap and inside it. Nearer and nearer came the first boat, a small, speedy motorcraft. Its black nose darted inside the headlands of the Gap, and it swung away from the Stone Tor shore, direct for the side of the Gap on which Clinton had stood his lonely vigil.

Slade had been right!

Clinton felt a genuine tingle of pride. Once more the Department had found itself a leap ahead. A burst of fire came from the pursuing coastguard vessel. That was Clinton's signal.

Taking the automatic from his pocket, he began pumping bullets at the motor-boat as it ran up the Gap immediately beneath him. He heard a muffled cry, and then the boat slewed round, and tried to make for the Stone Tor side. Clinton gave another burst of fire. He heard some of the bullets strike metalwork. Then the searchlight swung at a

sharp angle. The coastguard cutter was pursuing at an abrupt diagonal. The motor-boat was more speedy, but could it close that gap in time?

The chances are that it might have done so had the fight been concluded upon the same exchange of shooting as before; but now machine-gun fire raked the distance between the motor-boat and the farther shore, held it back from security.

Wide-eyed, Clinton watched the coastguard cutter draw closer, the ray from the searchlight casting a brilliant hard light over the scene. He saw Slade's figure leap to the flimsy foredeck of the motor-boat, and the flash of a gun. Then the Yard man and the occupant of the motor-boat were fighting for life as the untended craft veered in a wide circle, the coastguard cutter following.

The motor-boat suddenly straightened course, came for Clinton's shore, and the sergeant scrambled down, his gun levelled, to meet whoever stepped ashore.

But the man who rose from the motor-boat's stern was Slade. There was blood on his face, but Clinton, looking beyond his chief, saw in the motor-boat the crumpled figure of a man whose wrists were secured by a pair of regulation handcuffs.

"Well, another little job's over, Clinton," said Slade lightly. "Did you freeze?"

"I thawed quick enough when I saw you jump him," grinned Clinton. "It's Jenkinson, as you guessed? Running smuggled stuff?"

"Jenkinson is a new name, Clinton. Look. Does this recall anything to your mind?"

Slade bent over the gunwale of the boat and raised his prisoner's fettered wrists. Two middle fingers were missing from the man's left hand.

"Not Victor Jury!" Clinton exclaimed.

"The same," Slade nodded. "Disappeared when he had finished his time on Dartmoor, but he evidently got to like the loneliness—or did he fear Craven, the man he left to sweat for that heroin-smuggling? We'd have got Craven only things went wrong, and Craven got out by the skin of his teeth, and Jury lost two fingers in the Wapping scrap. Four or five years ago, and now, under the name Jenkinson, he's finding silk and perfumery profitable to bring in at night."

The man in the boat sneered.

"A very pretty story." His eyes gleamed with hostility. "But you can't hold me. Running contraband in Cornwall

isn't something a blasted Yard busy can poke his nose into."

The man stared at the waiting shape of the coastguard cutter. But Slade made no move.

"I'm not interested in contraband, Jury," said Slade. "I want you for the murder of Craven—*alias* John Carruthers, who has been staying in Bellumport posing as an artist. Craven meant to get you or soak you for plenty, but again you were too slippery for him. You shot him in the back of the head."

Jury laughed.

"What can you prove?" he taunted.

"That Craven was murdered on red-sandstone soil, and with a thirty-two weapon——"

Slade said that slowly, and he was ready for the manacled man's lightning move. As Jury snatched the pistol from under the seat and aimed it at the dark waters Slade pounced. His blow broke Jury's aim, and the gun fell into the boat.

"Just the one thing I wanted, Jury—the weapon *with your finger-prints!*"

The searchlight on the coastguard cutter winked twice.

"Climb in, Clinton, or our friends will get impatient. They are going to escort us to Bellumport, and report from there."

As the sergeant got into the boat Slade wrapped the gun in a handkerchief and placed it in his pocket. He put the engine in gear and opened the throttle, and then turned the nose of the small craft towards the open sea.

THE KIDNAPPED FILM STAR

SUPERINTENDENT ANTHONY SLADE of Department X2, New Scotland Yard, looked gravely into the darkly beautiful eyes of Sonia Vale. Between those eyes lay a frown, like a cloud shadow on clear water.

The voice of she who had been billed as "the world's most beautiful woman" spoke slowly to the detective.

"Superintendent," she said, "I should not have asked for police protection, except that I am positive Logan Marsh will do me an injury if he can."

Slade nodded thoughtfully, his gaze turning to the open window and the green expanse of the garden surrounding the house that was the famous film star's home during her stay in England. In the distance the sun's rays melted in a sheen of silver water.

"A physical injury, Miss Vale?"

Slade's tone was non-committal, but he knew the story. Sonia Vale had divorced Logan Marsh in Reno, and when the star had come to England to play the lead in the Coronet Films' production of *The Romantic Miss Carstairs* Marsh had followed her. He had made himself a nuisance in the States. Now...

"Not necessarily." Her tone was controlled, faintly ringing. "I am acting with Basil Bruce, Superintendent, and he——"

She hesitated, and the Yard man bowed his head.

"I think I understand, Miss Vale. The newspapers have hinted strongly..."

His own pause was a tactful question.

"I hope when this picture is made, Superintendent, that our engagement may be announced."

"I see. Meantime, you think Mr. Marsh may take advantage of the situation?"

"I think he is mad enough to try anything. He wants money, and he hates me. I'm afraid, Superintendent. That's why I have taken this house in the country. I drive to the studios every day, and drive back. There is only another six days' work to finish the picture—a bare week; but I'm afraid I'm becoming too womanish. I want reassuring. It's the suspense, I think..."

She too stared out through the window.

"I shall try not to be obtrusive," Slade promised. "But Mr. Marsh, I believe, before his marriage to you, Miss Vale, was a noted swimmer. Am I right?"

Her mouth pursed.

"It's the only clean thing about Logan Marsh," she said bitterly, "his fondness for water.... But even the river has its—water-rats!"

Sergeant Clinton, Slade's right-hand assistant, who had journeyed to the beautiful home in the Surrey downlands with his chief, was roaming among riotous-hued flower-beds when Slade came up with him.

"Not so bad as I thought, Clinton," said Slade, stuffing tobacco into a well-burned briar. "Nothing there of the temperamental darling of the public eye. And she's got ideas."

"What about the much-advertised beauty? Is it worth the advertising?"

The hard-headed sergeant grinned.

"Sonia Vale is a very interesting woman," said Slade. "Let's leave it at that, Clinton."

The sergeant's grin expanded.

For two days life at Sonia Vale's home went on in its normal uninterrupted course. The newspapers and magazines continued their campaign of publicity, but in the retreat of the Surrey garden the famous film star became her natural self. She rose early of a morning, and while the dew was still damp on the lawns went for a swim. Those early-morning swims had given Slade something to ponder.

On the third day after his arrival at Chalton Dean he was in the garden a full quarter of an hour before Sonia Vale's bathrobed figure came tripping towards the lake. The Yard man took care that the film star did not observe him. He saw her slip off the bathrobe, poise her white arms above her head, and her lithe figure cleaved the smooth surface of the water.

He watched her bright-capped head travelling towards the river that fed the small lake. On the far bank of the river willows dropped a leafy screen. Slade watched thoughtfully.

The scarlet bobbing cap covering the film star's blonde curls was half-way towards the hedgerow gap that marked the line of the river when Slade saw another figure in the water. Bare arms rose and played through the water like driving paddle-wheels. The second figure rapidly overhauled the first. The scarlet cap darted this way and that, but without avail. Those thrashing arms drove forward with unshakable purpose. They reached the scarlet cap. Faintly to the Yard man's ears came a thin cry. There was a long moment when the scarlet cap was under the surface of the water, but it reappeared, and Slade breathed a sigh of relief.

But now the scarlet cap was accompanying the second figure. It passed through the gap in the hedgerows, marking the boundary of the large, sprawling garden of several acres, out into the river. There was a frantic splashing, and then the cap had disappeared.

Still thoughtful, Slade walked back to the house.

It was now up to Clinton.

Much the same thought was in the sergeant's mind as he lay under that screen of weeping willows, wondering if the dampness of early morning would soak through to his bones, and watched the scarlet cap come towards the bank of the river on which he lay concealed. He could see now that the wearer of the scarlet cap was a prisoner.

As the two swimmers waded from the river the captor kept an arm firmly about his captive's waist. Clinton recognized the much-photographed faces of both Sonia Vale and Logan Marsh.

"And this is the sort of stuff mugs pay to see," he grunted to himself, rising to his feet and dusting scraps of grass and mould from his clothes. Still keeping behind the willow curtain, the sergeant watched the other two

reach the road. A man got out of a parked car, with a couple of overcoats. One was thrown round the girl. Logan Marsh donned the other. Then both got into the car, the girl not without putting up a futile effort to retain her liberty, and the car drove off.

Clinton rubbed his jaw.

"Now for it," he muttered.

Dragging a motor-cycle from under a green tarpaulin cover, he kicked the engine into life, and set off in pursuit. The machine was fitted with an effective silencer.

While Clinton was carefully making his way in the wake of the kidnapper's car, Anthony Slade sat in the morning room at Chalton Dean, staring at congealing bacon and chilling toast. His mind was not on his food, and he ate mechanically. He looked up as soon as the door opened, and a soft-footed servant announced that Miss Vale was wanted on the 'phone.

"I'll take it," said Slade, springing from his chair.

The caller was Basil Bruce, and there was a note of strained anxiety in his voice.

Slade replied with a nice choice of words, and when he replaced the receiver he was smiling. He went back to the morning-room and finished his breakfast with a noticeably improved appetite.

"As long as you don't lose them, Clinton," he reflected, "it will work out."

But Sergeant Clinton was a hard man to fool, and a harder to elude. The car was kept in sight for the best part of sixty miles, and not once did the cautious Yard man allow the occupants to think themselves followed. Not that Logan Marsh, elated at the success of his coup, gave a thought to possible pursuit. He addressed the woman who once had married him, only to regret the vows she had made, in mock chivalrous vein.

"You are still ravishing, Sonia sweet. I hope my knight-errant act appealed to your sense of the dramatic."

Sonia Vale remained silent, crouched in the large overcoat swathing her.

"But you will appreciate that I had little time at my disposal," resumed Marsh, "and needs must when His Infernal Majesty drives." His eyes narrowed, and an ugly crease appeared at one side of his mouth. "Or when Basil Bruce appears on the scene."

The woman's head jerked upright.

"What is this? A trick, I know... I couldn't expect anything else from you, Logan. But what sort of trick, just how low?"

The man laughed, amused.

"Forget that note of high scorn, darling. It's wasted. The Kleig lights aren't burning," He leaned nearer. "You have four days to finish your English contract, Sonia. If you failed to complete the picture in those four days, because you found your ex-husband irresistible — what then? Wouldn't your reputation be damaged—seriously? And the charming Basil, with that clean boyish smile, my dear. Have you thought of the effect on him?"

Her breath came sharply.

"What are you trying to tell me, Logan?"

He smiled. In a dark, sardonic way he was handsome, and too many women had assured him of this for him to doubt it.

"Much better," he murmured. "You are taking an interest—I hope an intelligent interest. Sonia, I'm taking you to a place I have, dug away in the heart of Sussex, where no one would think of looking for you. Either you pay me what I want or—you stay."

"So you think you can drive a bargain?"

"Sonia darling, I am certain of it."

His laughter mocked her.

"If you broke this English contract for what would appear to be a whim—shall we say?—your name would be mud, my precious... perhaps slimy mud. And with this new method of exchange of stars between Hollywood and England, that might affect you—er—considerably. Of course, you have made a lot of money. Who should know better than I? For years I had the pleasure of spending it. But think of the devoted Basil. Wouldn't his devotion be dangerously strained if the bright star of his firmament—um—waned?"

She made no rejoinder, and wisely Logan Marsh, whose knowledge of the workings of a woman's mind had many times been termed "uncanny" by an exasperated counsel, refrained from further talk. He knew the yeast he had thrown into her mind would work well.

"Here, my dear, is our little nest," he said, as at last the car drew up before a country-house almost lost between tall plane-trees. "Round the back, Joe," he added to the man driving.

The car swung off the road. Three minutes later a silent motor-cycle slipped by, roared on to the next village, and Clinton made his way to the nearest 'phone-box.

Sonia Vale was escorted to a bedroom. Logan Marsh stood in the doorway, smoking a cigarette and smiling, as she surveyed the clothes laid out on the bed.

"I should hate Basil to think you were with me entirely without suitable garb," he said, in reply to the sharp question in her eyes.

She shuddered.

"What do you mean, Logan? Why is that smirk on your face?"

"Ah, still the heroine's technique! Well, I can bear it—for fifty thousand pounds."

"Fifty thousand pounds!" she echoed.

"Your hearing is still good, Sonia. That was the sum I mentioned. You'd best make up your mind quickly. In fact, within the hour, unless you want Basil——"

She came nearer to him. Shadows lay in her large wide eyes, and fear pencilled the drawn expression of her mouth.

"Why do you keep reminding me of Basil?" she murmured huskily.

"Aren't you in love with him?" he taunted her.

"I said why, Logan."

The mockery disappeared from the man's face.

"Because he will be here within that hour I mentioned. That is, if he is punctual—and you should know best about that—and, of course"—he hesitated tantalizingly—"if he is still in love with you."

She flinched.

"You beast!"

He shook his head. He had long been invulnerable to hard words.

"Merely a man of the world, my little wife that was. Fifty thousand pounds, and you are free to go with Basil with my blessing, and something you will value far more than that—namely, my assurance to Basil that you and I have amicably settled an age-old dispute. But be difficult about those fifty thousand jimmy o' goblins, sweetheart, and another, very different, picture will be staged for Basil. I venture to say he would be shocked, and what he would tell Coronet Films would soon be everybody's business."

Her hand trembled against her lips.

"Impossible! You couldn't force me to act a part... like that!"

"I shouldn't have to try, darling." He smiled again when he saw conviction brighten her eyes with new-found dread. "You see?"

He drew an hypodermic syringe from his pocket. She looked at it, and crumpled.

"Better get some clothes on, and fix your face, Sonia love, while I attend to the important matter of breakfast. Even film stars act more *reasonably*"—he gave the word particular stress—"on a full stomach. And, unless my memory is playing me tricks, you always had an excellent appetite. Remember that night at the San Pedro Bar——"

"Get out!"

She flung herself at the door. He shrugged, slipped outside the room, and turned the key in the lock. Thoughtfully he went downstairs. Yes, he thought, he had reason enough to congratulate himself. He had planned well.

Breakfast appeared, and Marsh took some up on a tray to Sonia's room. His expression did not change when he saw that she had dressed herself.

"I had the clothes copied from a film magazine with a supplement on Sonia Vale," he said lightly. "You don't mind if I stay and smoke?"

"Have I any option?" she retorted.

"Practically, no; but I like to do things with a certain amount of finesse. So much more satisfactory." He watched her stir coffee and slice a grilled kidney. "Now, about this fifty thousand pounds, Sonia—have you made up your mind?"

"Yes."

"Excellent."

"Are you sure?"

Her voice was controlled, calm. He pulled the cigarette from his mouth savagely.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you are not getting the money, Logan, that's all."

Her eyes met his. She pushed a piece of bread between her lips and smiled tantalizingly.

"You see, Logan, something you didn't know is that when I get back to the States I'm starting my own company. I shall want that fifty thousand—badly."

He laughed, but his tone was not as controlled as hers.

"Then you think I was bluffing about Basil Bruce coming here?"

"I am sure of it."

He shrugged. "It's your funeral, of course."

She lifted her coffee-cup. "The prisoner ate a hearty breakfast. That's what I am, isn't it—a prisoner?"

His smile changed to a faint scowl. He glanced at his watch. "For God's sake, Sonia, have some sense! Basil Bruce is due at any time now. I mean it. That's the solemn truth!"

"I shall believe when I—see!"

He stepped backward. "You mean, you're going to let him think, then, that——"

"I mean your bluff isn't good enough this time, Logan. You should try changing your technique. It's rusty, you know... so rusty, it creaks."

He opened his mouth to speak, but closed it quickly as the sound of a car's engine drew nearer. The glances of the two in the room met and clashed. Stiffly, her heart beating wildly, the film star rose and walked to the window. Logan Marsh stood behind her.

"Well?"

He purred the word in her ear. She stood rigid as a car swung off the road and drew to a halt. She knew the familiar scarlet streamlining of the sports car. She knew too that pinched-up green hat and pale trench-coat worn by the man who got out of the car.

"Basil!" she murmured.

At the word Logan Marsh seized her.

"There's still time to sign that cheque if you don't want him to find you in my arms." His hand went into the pocket she knew held the syringe. "Well?" he repeated.

"I haven't a cheque-book."

He breathed a sigh of relief. Logan Marsh knew feminine capitulation when he saw it. He took a pen and cheque-book from his coat.

"It's all right, Sonia my dear. I took the precaution of making certain it was issued by the branch you use."

She sat at the table, and he slid the cheque-book and pen in front of her. She unscrewed the pen and flicked it to ensure that the ink ran freely; then she opened the cheque-book. As the trembling pen in her hand hovered over the blue strip of paper there was sound of a heavy body falling outside the room.

Marsh strode to the door.

"What the hell——"

As he reached it the door was flung open. On the threshold stood a man in pinched-up green hat and pale trench-coat.

"Basil, I swear I didn't come here——"

Sonia Vale broke off, staring at the man in the doorway. It was not Basil Bruce.

"Quite all right, Miss Vale," said Anthony Slade. He glanced from Marsh to the cheque-book on the table and the pen in Sonia Vale's hand. "I trust you haven't signed yet?"

"No, Superintendent, I——"

"Look here," blustered Marsh. "What the devil do you mean by crashing in here in this fashion——"

"I should have preferred to enter more pacifically," Slade smiled, "but one of your strong-arm merchants thought otherwise. Now he's past thinking for some minutes."

He stepped aside and allowed the stupefied Marsh to see the prone figure of a man in the corridor outside the room. Marsh doubled a fist, but Slade caught the man's wrist.

"Easy," he advised. "Kidnapping in this country carries a long term—with violence a longer term."

The other's arm dropped.

"But, Superintendent," began the perplexed woman, "what does it mean? How can——"

Again her inquiry was cut short, this time by a woman's scream. A minute later Clinton appeared dragging a fighting, clawing woman with a very painted face and very bleached hair.

"Look who I found," he said to Slade. "Molly Joyce. So this is how she's keeping body and soul together while her husband's doing three years on the moors. Molly likes luxury." Clinton's appraisive eye wandered over Marsh. "Let's hope she's picked some one who can foot the bill. Jim Joyce will be mad when he hears."

The woman stopped struggling, and turned to Slade.

"You wouldn't let Jim know, would you, Superintendent? I only meant a bit of fun, honest. Jim'd kill me if he knew." She glared from Sonia to Marsh. "And he said it would be just like a honeymoon, the dirty cheat! With another woman in the place! Why, if I'd got my hands free——"

"Take her out, Clinton. We'll question her later."

The woman renewed her struggles as the sergeant prepared to carry out his instructions. Slade closed the door and turned back to the two in the room.

"It's becoming all rather obvious, but we shall want statements later," he explained. "Meantime, Miss Vale, if you

care to go downstairs, you'll find Mr. Bruce in his car. No doubt he is becoming very impatient."

"Then he was coming here!"

"Certainly. But he took the precaution of 'phoning your home first. That gave me an idea. Oh, by the way, I wonder if you wouldn't mind taking his coat and hat. I should like mine in return. Thanks."

Slade slipped out of his hat and coat and gave them to the woman, who left the room.

Marsh spun round.

"You can't prove a damned thing!" he shouted.

"That's what you think," Slade returned lightly. "Have you forgotten Molly?"

"What about her?"

"Her husband is doing three years for house-breaking, and he's a very jealous man. Molly won't want him to know how a fascinating stranger took her in. She wants Jim Joyce to think she lives by going out to work each day. Well, perhaps Jim will be allowed to think that if she doesn't cause us any trouble—and she won't. Molly knows how strong Jim's hands are."

"Then you mean——"

"I mean, Logan Marsh, you've been a perfect chef, and cooked your own goose to a turn. You think you've a card up your sleeve—namely, a Reno divorce doesn't hold in this country. But to a man of the world like yourself, I ask you, what do you think Molly's story would be worth in court?"

Logan Marsh's sardonic jaw dropped.

"Exactly," said Slade. "Well, let's get going."

MR. BURGOYNE'S OCTOPUS

THE STATION sergeant's fingers fidgeted with a button of his tunic.

"It's Mrs. Burgoyne," he said to Inspector Humphreys. "She's got something on her mind, something about her husband and an octopus."

Inspector Humphreys was a level-headed country policeman who had won to his rank by hard routine work.

"Nonsense, sergeant" he smiled tolerantly. "We're eighty miles from the nearest coastline."

But the sergeant was dogged.

"It was octopus, all right," he asseverated. "Mr. Burgoyne's got one."

The Inspector's smile widened.

"All right, show her in, sergeant."

Mrs. Burgoyne, a small woman, plump, rather too red in the face, bustled in. Her eyes were beady-bright, and there were creases at the sides of her thin mouth. In five minutes she had poured out her trouble.

"Every night, Inspector," she wailed, "my husband shouts in his sleep, 'The octopus! The octopus!' And he isn't himself at all lately. He's depressed and gloomy. I don't know what's wrong, but I do know it isn't his health. There's something on his mind. It's been like this for weeks and I can't stand it any longer. I had to come to you."

From above red rims her dark eyes peered at the police officer. Humphreys, noted for his tact, was gentle with her.

"Perhaps Mr. Burgoyne should see a specialist. Perhaps his mind..."

He hesitated to make his meaning too obvious. The woman understood and shook her head.

"No," she said firmly, "something's happened. Don't ask me how I know, but I do. Herbert has been a changed [redacted] lately, a different man. Inspector, I want you to come and talk to him."

"I would be quite willing to talk to your husband, Mrs. Burgoyne, but really I don't see how, in the circumstances, I can——"

"Never mind all that, Inspector. Will you come?"

The beady-bright eyes made the question a challenge. Inspector Humphreys, who was a bachelor, mentally condemned all busy-body wives to a tropical hereafter, and recalled that Mrs. Burgoyne was a substantial contributor to the local police charities.

"Very well, Mrs. Burgoyne. I will see your husband. When do you wish me to call?"

He was not prepared for her answer.

"Now, at once," she said quickly. "Don't argue, please. I feel I can't wait another hour. I want you to talk to Herbert, because I know you will do him good, and if he has done something—something silly, I know you will help him."

Inspector Humphreys felt that Mrs. Burgoyne was wielding a double-edged weapon. He rose and took down his peaked cap. As he followed her into the charge-room he said to the grinning sergeant, "I shan't be long"; which, for a truthful man, was a singularly incorrect statement. Inspector Humphreys was gone the whole afternoon.

He drove with Mrs. Burgoyne in her car to the Burgoynes' pretentious house on the outskirts of the small Midlands town. As he climbed out of the car a man walked down the drive. He touched his hat when he saw Mrs. Burgoyne.

"Who's that?" inquired the Inspector.

"Wimble, the gardener. He's leaving us today."

Humphreys followed Mrs. Burgoyne into the house. She led him up a flight of wide stairs. "Perhaps I should have told you," she explained, "I made my husband keep in bed this morning."

Humphreys nodded, and wondered what sort of a drumming he would get from Burgoyne. The latter had something of a reputation as a martinet. There were rumours about the way he ran his printing-works in the town. He little relished the task wished upon him by the portly little woman with her fussing ways and hair that would insist upon remaining untidy.

She opened a door, and said, "Herbert, I've brought someone to see you."

There was no reply from the figure in the bed, and for the excellent reason that Mr. Herbert Burgoyne had some time before spoken his last words in this life. The police surgeon summoned by Humphreys' 'phone call decided that Mr. Burgoyne had been poisoned. He thought potassium cyanide had been administered to the dead man.

He was right, as the results of the post-mortem revealed. Humphreys, upon investigation, decided that Herbert Burgoyne had been murdered, and advised his Chief Constable accordingly. The latter, his shoulders bowed under such pressing police matters as a new traffic-control system and a fresh drive to end street gambling, decided that this was a case where the aid of Scotland Yard might be invoked.

That was how Superintendent Anthony Slade, of the Criminal Investigation Department (X2), New Scotland Yard, with his chief assistant, Sergeant Clinton, came to travel one morning in late summer to the smoky Midlands town of Poolhampton.

Humphreys was frankly glad to greet the arrivals from London. He told them all he knew of the case, and then, turning to Slade with renewed interest, added, "That octopus part beats me. His wife was right. He had something on his mind, something that decided some one to kill him."

"I suppose there's no doubt murder was committed," Slade put in.

"Not a doubt in the world," Humphreys replied briskly. "The stuff was put in his medicine."

"So he was under a doctor?"

"Nominally, yes. His wife made him consult the family physician. You know how it is."

"Any children?"

"No."

Slade and Clinton paid a visit to the late Herbert Burgoyne's home, and there they listened to Mrs. Burgoyne's story of her husband's nightly waking and crying, "The octopus!"

"What do you make of it?" Clinton asked his chief when they were alone in the dead man's library.

"Unusual," Slade murmured, his keen gaze wandering round the book-lined walls.

"But that octopus stuff. More like D.T.'s to me."

Slade smiled, and said nothing. He went through the dead man's desk, scrutinizing papers. He was in the middle

of some accounts when Clinton wandered back from the open French windows.

"Think that gardener had anything to do with it?" he asked.

"What makes you ask?" said Slade.

"Burgoyne's bedroom was over this room. A gardener with a ladder could have got in, put some cyanide in the medicine, and got down again without anyone knowing. He had the opportunity, and Mrs. Burgoyne says he suddenly came to her and said he wanted to leave. No explanation, no excuse."

"And a gardener has plenty of opportunity of getting cyanide," said Slade. "Go down to the garden-shed, Clinton, and see what weed-killers are kept there."

While the sergeant occupied himself with this errand Slade continued his search through the papers. He found nothing of real interest among them, nothing that would give him a lead to the solution of Burgoyne's death—or those feverish words about an octopus. Only when he had scanned every paper did the Yard detective give his attention to the drawers of the desk. There was just a chance that the desk contained a secret compartment. It was a large, old-fashioned roll-top desk made from dark, stained oak. His prying fingers worked for seven minutes before a click rewarded their thoroughness.

A panel in the back of the desk slid back, revealing a grooved wooden tray. In that tray were several papers. Slade took them out and glanced at them. The first was a holographed will, signed and dated nearly four months previously. The other papers, seven in all, were single sheets, and each contained a crudely-worded warning. The first read: "Fear is an octopus. You are afraid. You have reason to be afraid. Beware of my tentacles." At the foot was a roughly-drawn circle, with waving lines projecting from it. The message was written in ink in quickly formed capitals.

Clinton appeared on the terrace outside.

"No luck. Every tin has an arsenic base," he reported. His glance fell on the papers in Slade's hand. "Something important?" he asked.

"The octopus," said Slade, and his tone was grim.

Clinton read the slips of paper. A frown of deep puzzlement settled on his square face.

"Sounds like a nightmare," he muttered.

Slade looked up.

"You're right, Clinton. That's exactly what it was—a nightmare. It was meant to be."

"I don't understand. What are these bits of paper?"

"Unless I miss my guess by a million miles, they were fantastic warnings sent to Burgoyne by someone who knew he had a secret, and knew, further, that what they hinted at would prey on his mind. They probably arrived regularly, and their regular arrival worked havoc with Burgoyne's nerves."

"Maybe," Clinton objected, "but what was the object of that if whoever sent them intended to poison him later?"

"That, Clinton, is our puzzle. For the moment I'm going to say nothing about this will. It's recent, and I shouldn't be surprised if Burgoyne made it out after he received these 'warnings'—or, at any rate, the first of them. Concealing it with them suggests that they were linked together in some way in his mind. There was nothing else in that secret compartment of the desk. But we'll see what Mrs. Burgoyne has to tell us."

At first Mrs. Burgoyne would say nothing. She was tearful and distracted, and Slade had to change his tactics. He became more harsh in manner, more direct, and an accusatory note crept into his voice.

Suddenly the woman's tears stopped, and apprehension dawned wakefully in her beady-bright eyes.

"What have you found out?" she demanded. "Tell me."

"I want to know what secret your husband had in his life, Mrs. Burgoyne. I must know."

"But, Superintendent, I tell you again, I don't know of any——"

Slade interrupted brusquely.

"Please don't lie to me, Mrs. Burgoyne. Here is evidence that you know."

The woman paled as he produced the will, folded back a page, and pointed to several lines of writing, which read: "And to my wife, Elizabeth Margaret, who for years has sustained me mentally and physically and who has faithfully kept my secret..."

The woman stifled a sharp cry.

"What is that secret?" demanded Slade again.

"I'll tell you," she confessed, in a hushed voice. "I promised him I would never tell, but now——"

She hesitated. Clinton looked at his chief. Slade was watching the woman's face closely. He said nothing.

"My husband had a half-brother, younger than himself," she resumed. "Some money was stolen. It was traced to

my husband's brother, and he was arrested, tried, and sent to prison. But Jack did not steal that money. My husband —God forgive me!—was the thief!"

She sat down, bent her head in her plump hands, and cried.

At length she looked up at Slade, waiting for her to continue.

"Jack was released from gaol five months ago, and he came straight here. There was nowhere else for him to go. We had to do something for him, while he collected his life, as it were, and—and he was desperate. You see?"

Slade's eyes were narrowed. He was thinking rapidly, and out of this strange tangle a pattern was forming in his mind.

"I see that Wimble the gardener might have been your husband's half-brother, Mrs. Burgoyne," he said slowly.

She gasped. "Then you know!"

"I know"—Slade tapped the will—"that your husband divided his money and his business equally between you and his half-brother."

For a moment a look of frank disbelief remained engraved on her face. Slowly it changed.

"But surely Jack wouldn't have——"

She stopped, breathing heavily.

"Murdered his brother, who had wronged him? You said he was desperate, Mrs. Burgoyne."

"Yes, but——"

"Whose suggestion brought him here in the guise of a gardener?"

She seemed to weigh her answer carefully—to reflect.

"Mine, I think. Yes, mine, Superintendent."

"Very well. I shall want to look round your own room, Mrs. Burgoyne. I don't want another tragedy if it can be avoided."

She paled again. His meaning was unmistakable. She opened her mouth to protest, but thought again, and the protest was changed to reluctant acquiescence.

"Very well."

She went upstairs with the Yard man, opened the door of her private room, and Slade entered. The Yard man walked straight to the window, and appeared to study the lie of the garden paths, but actually he was watching the woman closely. He saw her gaze turn swiftly to a cabinet next to the silken-covered bed.

"I think I had better be alone, Mrs. Burgoyne, if you don't mind," he said, turning round.

She left him. Slade waited some seconds after the door had closed, then went to the cabinet, opened its double doors, and surveyed a shelf of bottles; he raised stoppers and sniffed, then opened the drawers in the under part of the cabinet. At the back of one drawer, tied with a broad piece of blue ribbon, was a bundle of letters. They were addressed to Betty in endearing terms, and signed "your loving Jack."

Twenty minutes later Slade went downstairs, met Clinton in the garden, and said, "Did she 'phone?"

"Why, yes," said the sergeant. "How did you guess?"

"Never mind. Who did she call?"

"Somebody named Reeves, at the printing-works in the town."

"Come on," said Slade. "I want to see Humphreys, and it's urgent."

Humphreys was surprised when Slade made his request.

"Of course, I'll take you to the mortuary, but it's all a bit mysterious. Can't you let a fellow into the mystery?"

"Not till I'm sure," said the Yard man.

At the mortuary they were shown the bodies of three people brought in during the past twenty-four hours. Two were men, one was a woman. When Humphreys saw the body of the second man he started.

"Why, that's the gardener Wimble!" he exclaimed.

"Burgoyne's half-brother," explained Slade, "not long out of jug for a theft he didn't commit. I thought as much. Where was he found, and what was on the body?"

The information was speedily forthcoming. The unfortunate Wimble had been found on a country road. There was some money in his pockets, nearly four pounds in total, and a package of sandwiches, one half-eaten.

"I want it analysed," said Slade.

"But good Lord, man!" grumbled Humphreys, "you must have a reason!"

"Plenty," Slade declared. "Now I want to 'phone the printing-works. Know of a fellow named Reeves?"

"He's the manager. Was next to Burgoyne himself. They were friends. Young and good-looking, and a bit of a dandy."

"Married?"

"No."

Slade 'phoned the works, spoke to Mr. Reeves, and went to see him. They talked about the late Herbert Burgoyne, and Mr. Reeves spoke in quiet tones of his late employer's

many virtues. When he left the printing-works Slade sent Clinton to the police-station.

"Get the analyst's report on those sandwiches, Clinton. That job won't have taken long, and meet me across the road by half-past five."

Clinton was back by twenty-past five. Slade was where he had left him.

"There was cyanide in those sandwiches," he announced. "You guessed that?"

"I had an idea there would be. Now let's keep out of sight. I want to follow Mr. Reeves when he leaves. I've an idea where he'll head for."

They saw Reeves leave the works, take a sharp look round, and then set off at a brisk pace towards the centre of the town. He had a meal in a smart restaurant, and then hired a taxi. Slade and Clinton followed in another. Reeves led them to the Burgoynes' home.

Slade allowed the caller ten minutes, and then he and Clinton rang the door-bell.

Mrs. Burgoyne was surprised to see them. Reeves rose, saying, "Well, this is a sudden meeting again, Superintendent."

Slade said, "Is it? I've come to tell Mrs. Burgoyne a little story."

The widow laughed uncertainly.

"Really, Superintendent, I fail to see——"

"Perhaps that's been the trouble, Mrs. Burgoyne," he said gravely. "A middle-aged woman failed to see that a good-looking young man was only using her for his own ends."

Reeves sprang to his feet.

"This is intolerable!" he shouted. "You are superseding your duty!"

"I am superseding nothing," Slade replied. "I am here to solve the murder of Herbert Burgoyne."

"Then catch that damned gardener," sneered Reeves.

"We've caught him," said Slade.

"Then the case is ended," said Reeves confidently.

"It is. Burgoyne's half-brother was poisoned too. That was something you forgot to tell Mrs. Burgoyne *not* to do, Reeves—kill the only real suspect in the case."

Reeves fell back a step. As he did so Slade sprang forward, for the man's hand had gone to his pocket. There was a brief tussle before the two Yard men overcame him, and Slade wrenched the bottle from his hand. It was a

bottle from the shelf in the cabinet in Mrs. Burgoyne's room. It contained a mixture of pale yellow crystals.

"John Reeves and Elizabeth Burgoyne," said Slade, "I arrest you both for the murder of Herbert Burgoyne and the man known as Wimble."

Three-quarters of an hour later, at the police station, the widow confessed to her criminous folly. She had listened to the beguiling tongue of the fortune-hunting printing-works manager, and had believed him in love with her.

"What beats me," said Humphreys later that evening, as he sat at a meal with the two Yard men, "is how you got to the truth on the evidence you had, Slade. It meant nothing to me, even when you showed it to me."

"The will gave me the clue," said Slade. "Burgoyne made it obviously after a reconciliation. Well, after a reconciliation the reconciled half-brother does not suddenly walk out without a word. That meant, in effect, Mrs. Burgoyne had lied. She sacked 'Wimble' the gardener. Probably wouldn't let him see his brother, and he went, thinking it best to wait and bide his time. That was Reeves's scheme Burgoyne was dead by then, and Wimble was the obvious suspect. Burgoyne's secret would help to hang his half-brother, because it supplied a motive—long-awaited revenge."

"Yes, I can see how Reeves played on the wife's feelings, and finally got her to agree to murder, but what about the octopus business? Why all that jiggery-pokery?"

"To wear down Burgoyne's nervous strength. Doubtless he would suspect his half-brother of sending the 'warnings.' Anyway, it caused a rift in the family lute—a pretty big rift, as a matter of fact. Oh, Reeves was a clever rascal. He had the woman right under his thumb. Unfortunately for him, once in the plot, she worked on her own initiative, poisoned those sandwiches It spoiled the whole plot."

"I can see that, of course," said Humphreys, "but you haven't explained how you cottoned on to the fact that the so-called 'warnings' were linked to the woman."

"It was not difficult to deduce that," Slade smiled. "A little matter of a watermark. The same watermark was on the paper on which the will was made out. You've got the evidence. See for yourself."

Humphreys grinned wryly. "I will when I get back," he said. "But don't you think Reeves was taking a chance, with Burgoyne's will dividing the property?"

"Of course, but he didn't know about that will. There was another will, as you know now, in the hands of Burgoyne's solicitor. In it everything went to the wife."

"I see. There's the motive for her poisoning the half-brother."

"Naturally. She knew of the reconciliation, and probably guessed there was a fresh will. She wanted the young good-looking Mr. Reeves and *all* Burgoyne's effects. Perhaps she had sufficient sense to realize she would need them to hold her persuasive lover."

"It certainly looks like that. But what I can't understand is how Reeves got her to come to me with that story about the octopus."

"My dear Humphreys, a man who can persuade a woman to murder her husband, or let him do the murder with her acquiescence, can overcome a mere scruple of procedure. It was bold and suave, like the entire scheme. It took you in; it took me in at first, I admit. Where Reeves was at fault was in not getting rid of the cyanide sooner, and in not making sure she had destroyed his letters. And there was one other thing he should have done. Clinton knows what that was."

Humphreys glanced at the sergeant.

"Made sure there was some cyanide weed-killer in the garden-shed," said Clinton promptly.

"That was a big oversight," Slade nodded. "In fact, when you visualize the whole case together, it is riddled with oversight."

"Yes, *when*," smiled Humphreys, emphasizing the second word. "Well, it's proved a quicker case—thank heavens!—than I for one thought it would turn out to be. What about some more drink?"

"An excellent idea," Slade agreed.

THE LOST TUNES

PROBABLY THE most romantic time to fall in love is while one is spending a holiday at the seaside. At least, so thought Phyllis Moyle, as she regarded herself in the mirror of her room at The Cliff Hotel. A flip of a coin had brought her to Merhaven. She had been undecided whether to go to Merhaven or Sandbourne. The coin had come down heads, and heads had meant Merhaven.

Now she knew why. Wise in her twenty years she realized that life was lived to a pattern. Merhaven and Donald Trent were assuredly both discernible in the pattern of her life. Her gaze passed beyond the reflected room in the mirror to the cliff-top garden of the hotel beyond, through the window. She saw the trees and shrubs as pieces of a soothing mental background. Had she been more alert she might have noticed a figure which moved furtively between the shrubs bordering a garden path.

She went downstairs with a happy feeling in her heart. Donald loved her. The music from the ballroom seemed to repeat it. Yes, Fate made a pattern of people's lives. Another man's illness had indirectly been the cause of Donald and his friend John Wilson coming to Merhaven. Close on the heels of that thought came another. What had brought Francis Johnson? Did he too fit into the pattern of her life?

The thought troubled her. Johnson was fascinating. When his dark eyes looked into hers she felt as though the present were slipping away from her, as though the present and things around her didn't matter. He was the exact opposite of Donald Trent, and the two opposites tore strongly at her emotions.

She went into the lounge. Mr. and Mrs. Paldring sat by the open window.

"Doesn't that Mr. Johnson whistle marvellously?" remarked stout, freckle-faced Mrs. Paldring, who after a year of serving behind the counter in her husband's small grocer's shop had come to Merhaven intent upon enjoying herself—in her own way. Mrs. Paldring was a confirmed romantic, and figuratively she was placing her money on Johnson.

"He's got a way with him," she had told bald, slightly bandy Mr. Paldring.

"He's the sort that'd get away with anything," her spouse had replied, wilfully misunderstanding her. He now remarked, "I had a canary that could knock chips off him."

Mrs. Paldring sniffed very audibly, as though the reek of soap-flakes and starch still hung in her wide nostrils.

"And a dirtier bird I never saw," she remarked in turn. "Don't you think Mr. Johnson whistles marvellously?" she asked, appealing to Phyllis.

"Why, yes, Mrs. Paldring."

She listened to the clear notes of the person whistling, and thought of Francis Johnson's dark eyes.

"He's hired a car again," Mrs. Paldring informed her. "Got it in the garage and is looking over the engine. He's going for a long drive tomorrow, he said." She arched her bristly brows and grinned toothily. "Perhaps someone's going with him," she mused, very pointedly.

Phyllis laughed. She felt uncomfortable. However, she was saved from rejoinder by the figure of Johnson walking down the path from the garage at the rear of the garden. He was not whistling now. As Donald Trent did not turn up to take her in to dinner, she was escorted by Johnson. He was gay and full of interesting chatter—at least, chatter interesting to a girl of twenty who liked driving in cars because such an experience was a luxury.

"I wonder where Mr. Trent and Mr. Wilson are?" she asked, as fresh cutlets of veal were placed on the table. The Cliff Hotel always served veal cutlets on Wednesday evenings. It was a feature of the cuisine made clear in the badly-produced brochure the management sent to any who were foolish enough to inquire for it.

She helped herself to green peas and potatoes.

"Do you care where they are?" asked Mr. Johnson.

His eyes were challenging.

"Before I reply to that question——" she began, and got no farther. As though the words were a cue in a third-rate melodrama, the door opened, and Mrs. Crawsh, the pro-

prietress, came in, weeping hysterically. She was a widow, which, when one knew Mrs. Crawsh well, was not surprising.

"Oh, oh!" she cried, dabbing a ruined complexion with a not-too-fresh-looking handkerchief. "Something dreadful's happened! Something dreadful. My hotel will be ruined —utterly ruined!"

She slumped into a chair.

The "guests" put down their knives and forks, looked at one another, and talking ceased.

"Now, George," said Mrs. Paldring, "you're a man," an admission that, had she considered her words more carefully, she would have found inconsistent with her general contention regarding her husband's sex.

Mr. Paldring rose from his table, crossed to the proprietress, and cleared his throat in just such a manner as he adopted when adding up a customer's bill.

"Mrs. Crawsh, ma'am, really, if there is anything——"

"Anything!" the woman shrieked, beside herself. "Anything, you say! Mr. Wilson has been murdered!"

A gasp of horror went round the dining-room.

"His body lies in the bushes by the clock-golf course. He's been stabbed with a knife, and the police will be here any minute. Mary found the body, and she nearly fainted. There's a lot of blood, and—and the knife's still in the body. Oh, I am ruined—utterly ruined!"

The next morning the news was spread across the front pages of the national Press. A seaside murder in the height of the summer season was steaming news. The reporters did not allow the dish to cool. In fact, so much was made of "The Merhaven Stabbing Mystery" that the local police got cold feet quickly, and an application for help was sent speedily to Scotland Yard. Merhaven, the Borough Council decided, was getting the wrong sort of publicity.

The case was handed to Department X2 of the Yard's C.I.D., and in the middle of the afternoon of the day following the crime Superintendent Anthony Slade and his chief assistant, Sergeant Clinton, found themselves at The Cliff Hotel, in the company of Chief Inspector Perry of the local force.

"All right, Perry," said Slade after his first examination was completed, "let's get the points settled one by one. First, the knife. I understand it belonged to Wilson's friend Trent. Right?"

"Yes." The local man nodded. "We checked up on that.

He won it on the pier at some twopenny or threepenny game of skill. It's his all right."

"He's got no alibi. Arrived at the hotel nearly an hour after the body was found, and said he'd missed the bus back from Merling Beach."

"Correct, Slade. He'd been going about with a Miss Moyle that's stopping here. You saw her just now. Remember? But he didn't take her yesterday afternoon. All we can get out of him that makes sense is that he was looking at the place from an estate agent's point of view. You see, he is employed in an estate agent's office, and the firm has been looking for seaside building schemes to put on their books. There's quite a bit of bungalow building going on at Merling Beach."

Slade gave the local man a straight look.

"You don't believe that tale, eh, Perry?"

"Frankly, I don't. It's thin. And his fingerprints are on the knife. That makes it conclusive to my mind. But with you coming down we've held off making an arrest. It's an open and shut case to me."

"Then you've got a motive?"

Perry scratched his head.

"That's the one loose nail in the case, and you've hit it on the head. Motive. Wilson and Trent were friends; they came down here together; no one's aware of any quarrel. But there must be a motive, if we can find it."

"We shall," promised Slade. "You've heard what every one has to say. Tell me, is there anyone, to your mind, who has got a motive?"

"That fellow Johnson," Perry replied, after a pause. "He might be said to have one. He and Trent were both keen on the Moyle girl, from all accounts."

"Give me your notebook, Clinton," said Slade. He took the sergeant's notebook, scanned the notes Clinton had made, and closed it. "Johnson has an alibi," he added.

Perry waved a hand.

"Oh, you don't need to waste any time there. Johnson was in the garage with his hired car. The Paldrings saw him go to it, and heard him there until he came back to the hotel. The Moyle girl confirms that in part. No, Johnson's out of it. Find a motive for Trent, and the case is shut."

He rose.

"I'll be getting back to the station. Call me if you want anything. But take a tip, find that motive, Slade. Your work'll be easy then. Trent and Wilson quarrelled over something."

"Where is Trent?"

"In a room in Fore Street. It's not the most salubrious part of the town, but he's there under the name of Westwood, and we're keeping a very close eye on him. He's trying to dodge the reporters. Don't fear, he won't get away."

He left the two Yard men to themselves.

"Well Clinton, what do you think of the case?"

The sergeant picked up his notebook and put it in his pocket.

"I'm inclined to think it's one of find the motive. It shouldn't be too hard."

Slade nodded thoughtfully.

"Let's try Paldring again. He and his wife seem to be the busy-bodies around here. They might remember something."

"Or make something up—that's her type," said Clinton with conviction.

"Yes, we'll have to be careful of help that's too willing," Slade agreed.

The two detectives found the Paldrings in the lounge George Paldring removed his spectacles as Slade and Clinton approached, and his wife sniffed with her usual effectiveness.

"Sorry to trouble you again," said Slade, ingratiatingly "but you know any help one can get in a case like this is more than useful."

He thought the words well chosen, for they concealed his meaning admirably.

George Paldring shook his head.

"Terrible affair, terrible affair, Superintendent, but I've told you all I know. I wouldn't have thought that nice Mr Trent——"

Mrs. Paldring sniffed again, and went sailing into action with cleared decks.

"Nice, you call him, and he murdered his best friend! Well, there's no accounting for tastes." Apparently the reflective implication of this remark missed her probing mind. "Now, that Mr. Johnson, he's as different from Mr Trent as chalk from cheese. He *can* whistle, Superintendent! You should hear him. Like a bird—and I don't mean a canary." She flashed a glance at her husband. "I remember"—she shuddered, as she thought daintily—"while the murder was being committed he was whistling in the garage. You could hear him. I remember two of the tunes. Now, what were they? Let me see."

Clinton raised an appealing glance to his chief, but Slade wantonly remained listening with apparent interest to the good woman's burblings.

"Oh, yes, one was *Little Annie Rooney*. I remember distinctly, because I thought to myself, fancy his knowing that. It's long before his time. And the other was *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen*, another old favourite of mine. You see, Superintendent, my name's Kathleen, and ..."

This time Clinton's glance of appeal could not be denied. Slade made his escape, the sergeant close at his heels.

"If that's what she calls being helpful," grumbled Clinton, "I suggest we ask her to put a spoke in our wheel."

Slade laughed lightly.

"I think that's just what she's done, Clinton, but the spoke is not in our wheel."

"You mean——"

"I mean, speaking of wheels, let's have a look at the garage. There may be tyre-racks."

There were. The garage was a rude affair of two walls made of breeze-blocks, a corrugated-iron roof, and a sanded floor. In the sand diamond-shaped tyre-tracks were clearly super-imposed on some others.

"What do they tell you?" asked Clinton.

"Nothing—yet."

The detectives went back to the hotel. In the hall was Mary, the maid who had found the body.

"Haven't got a car here, have you?" asked Slade.

"No, the mistress hasn't one, sir. The only car is the one Mr. Johnson hired. And he took that back yesterday evening, after the body was found."

"I see. Well, Mary, you clean out the rooms, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Find anything interesting to clear away in Mr. Trent's room?"

"No, only some bus tickets and an empty cigarette packet."

"What about Mr. and Mrs. Paldring's room?"

The girl twisted her mouth.

"That woman gives me the fair sick, she does, sir. Curling-papers all over the floor, and she always brings back the greasy bags in which they have their sandwiches when they take packed lunch."

"And Mr. Johnson's room?"

The girl dimpled.

"Nothing much there, sir. Only the copy of the *Radio*

Times. I brought it down because it was the hotel copy. And a car-park ticket."

Surprisingly, Slade said, "May I see them? You haven't thrown them away?"

The girl looked surprised.

"The *Radio Times* is in the lounge. I don't think the other rubbish is burned. I'll see, if you like."

Slade did like, and the rubbish was not burned. Mary, after turning over a hod full of scraps taken from the rooms, found a ticket from the municipal car-park, dated the previous day. Slade kept it. He went through the *Radio Times*, and found that the page containing the previous day's Home programme had been torn out.

"Clinton," he said. "we're getting somewhere."

"I'm not inquisitive," the sergeant grunted, "but I'd like to know where."

"The notebook."

It was produced.

"We got from Perry the fact that Johnson hired his car from Martin and Stevens. All right. We'll pay them a visit."

The man remembered Mr. Johnson very well, and was able to show the detectives the car he had hired the previous morning.

"Look at the tyres, Clinton," said Slade. "Dunlop nineties, with a square tread."

"Well?" asked Clinton. "Does that mean another car?"

"Right first time, but a very special car, Clinton."

Slade produced a copy of the week's *Radio Times* he had purchased on the way to the garage, and turned to the Home programme for the previous day. "Look, seven to seven-fifteen, Chick Mulligan, the Irish-American whistling nightingale. Now do you see what sort of car we want?"

Clinton opened his mouth as Slade closed the *Radio Times*.

"Exactly," said the chief of Department X2. "One with a radio."

An hour and a half later they found a sports car with radio installed that had been hired out at midday the previous day and returned in the evening. The tyres were Goodyears, with diamond treads. The salesman at the Merhaven Car Mart was obliging, and allowed Slade to test the radio set. It was working, and gave remarkably clear reception.

"But what was done with the other car, the one from

Martin and Stevens?" asked Clinton, as the detectives left the obliging salesman.

"The car-park ticket is timed for nine-fifteen yesterday morning, Clinton. Unless I miss my guess it was driven straight there from Martin and Stevens. At that time there would not be many cars in the park. Too early for local visitors and for trippers too. We'll try our luck again."

Once more it held. The attendant remembered a car coming in at about quarter-past nine, as business was slack. He described the driver, and the description fitted with that of Francis Johnson.

"I shouldn't have remembered so easily," he said, "only the car was here all day. I wondered if it had been forgotten."

"Pop goes a nice alibi," grinned Slade to Clinton, as they returned to the hotel. "We'll get there in time for dinner. Fine. I'll 'phone Perry, and when he arrives we'll push the spoke Mrs. Paldring gave us right through Johnson's wheel."

"What spoke is that?"

"A couple of tunes Mrs. Paldring recognized. Irish tunes Chick Mulligan would know because yesterday he whistled for a quarter of an hour 'Shamrock Songs of Yesterday.' At least, the *Radio Times* says that's what he was due to whistle. It's a point that is easily checked up, and we needn't bother with it now."

Perry arrived about half-past seven, when, instead of veal cutlets, Phyllis Moyle found lamb chops in the dish put on her table. She looked across the slowly congealing chops at Francis Johnson, and his dark eyes smiled back at her.

"You're very beautiful, Phyllis," he said softly, "and for the third time since we sat down, I'm going to repeat that I love you, and we're going to be happy."

"You take a lot for granted . . . Francis."

"I've never taken you for granted, Phyllis. You were worth . . . the risk."

For a moment a mask concealed the thoughts behind his dark eyes. She trembled. Unaccountably, she felt afraid, and she could not help remembering Donald Trent. Try as she could, she found it impossible to forget him.

"What risk, Francis?"

The mask vanished. He was his easy, assured self again.

"Isn't any love—any big love, Phyllis—a risk? It's like rare china, fragile, it has to be handled carefully; and like rare china, it can last well-nigh for ever."

The warmth in his eyes was passionately possessive. She was stirred.

"Yes, but, Donald——"

As on the previous night, she was interrupted by the opening of the door. This time it was not Mrs. Crawsh who entered. Three men filed into the room and made for Phyllis's table. But none of them looked at Phyllis Moyle.

There was silence until Slade spoke.

"Mr. Johnson," he said, "I must apologize for disturbing your meal in this way, but I have a request to make."

Johnson crumbled a piece of bread. His fingers were steady.

"Why, not at all, Superintendent. I realize you have to get to people when they are available. What can I do for you?"

"Whistle a couple of tunes, Mr. Johnson, that is all. You don't object, I hope?"

Johnson laughed.

"Why, no, certainly not. But isn't this request a little unusual?"

"More than a little, Mr. Johnson. But you will whistle them?"

Coldness crept into the other's voice.

"I have said I will. What are they?" Lids drew down over the dark eyes. "I hope I know them."

"Just two Irish songs, Mr. Johnson. *Little Annie Rooney* and *I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen.*"

Johnson laughed again, this time not so easily.

"I'd be glad to, Superintendent." He paused, the fingers crumbling his bread moving more quickly. "But I'm afraid you're unlucky. You've picked a couple of songs I don't know."

Slade turned his gaze to Mrs. Palding's wide eyes. He gave the woman her chance, and she took it.

"Why, Mr. Johnson," she said, "you *do* know them. You whistled them yesterday evening when you were in the garage."

An ugly look came over Johnson's face. With difficulty he restrained himself from jumping up.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, Mrs. Paldring——"

"No, I'm not," she retorted, stung at thought of her word being doubted, and a little mystified. "Ask George," and she asked George herself. "Didn't he whistle those two songs, George?"

George had gone on with his chop, which he was secretly

convinced was mutton, not lamb. He nodded, his mouth full.

"That's right. Couldn't mistake them."

Johnson looked wildly round, but Clinton and Perry had closed in on each side of him.

"You made a clever play, Johnson," said Slade, "but that copy of the *Radio Times* and the car-park ticket bear out what Mrs. Paldring says. I must warn you, first, that anything——"

The table clattered over, and Johnson made a springing leap at the Yard man. Slade's fist caught him on the point of the chin, and the man measured his length on the floor. A couple of minutes later Slade and Clinton deposited his inert form in another room. Slowly he came round, shook his head, as though to clear it, and then attempted to recover his lost air of nonchalance.

"You've been very clever," he sneered, "but there's a little matter of fingerprints to be accounted for."

"Don't worry about a detail, Johnson," said the Yard man. "The rooms in this hotel are not locked. You had plenty of opportunity of getting into Trent's room and stealing his knife, and, naturally, you took care not to leave any prints of your own on the weapon. We shan't have much trouble in making that part of the case fit, when we get in court. But for a really original murderer, Johnson, you let yourself down badly by not knowing the tunes Chick Mulligan whistled. I've got a dozen witnesses who heard you say you didn't know two of them. You'll have difficulty in going back on that statement. Those lost tunes, Johnson, will hang you."

Slade's prophecy was fulfilled nearly nine months later.

THE SPIKED GUNN

PERCIVAL GUNN, playboy and man-about-town, had managed to retain for three years the originality with which he continued to shock London. Mothers who wished to hold up a horrible example of Gilded Vice (with capitals) to their blooming if not blushing daughters, pointed to Percival Gunn. Gold-diggers who wanted a short-cut to easy money tried to catch his eye. He had in his pocket all the millions collected by a frugal South African pioneer father whose spade had been far more profitable than a divining-rod.

War and depression, bad trade and political upheaval; nothing could affect the smooth flow of the Gunn millions into the various banks that had the luck to harbour them. Percival did his best. He managed to get through about a million a year, at a conservative estimate, but even his wild enthusiasm for spending was always slaked when he realized that he was confronted by the staggering fact that the Gunn mines near Kimberley, near Johannesburg, and on the Orange River, brought him in annually the sum of seven million pounds sterling.

Percy, as he was known to his friends and would-be friends, who were numerous, found the fact depressing. A psychologist might read a lesson in that; the ordinary man was content to envy.

Considerable sums of Percy's money had been demanded by irate magistrates, annoyed and somewhat alarmed at the nature of his various pranks. Painting the statue of Noll Cromwell a royal shade of purple had been considered bad taste. Even worse was his terrific hoax of a Serpentine monster; while his landing in Piccadilly Circus in a small autogiro, which he would persist in calling the flying earwig, and pretending he was a Martian, almost removed him from the public eye for a spell. Expensive counsel alone had saved him.

But the average Londoner was inclined to be tolerant. Percy—the Giddy Gunn to the man in the street—brought a patch of laughter and colour into a drab, workaday world. Even the average Londoner, however, sat up and took real notice when rumour circulated the prospect of Percy's fighting a duel in one of London's open spaces with the Conte di Sallando.

Who first spread the news the police could never discover. But all England knew of the coming duel within four days of Society receiving its first shock at the news. Friends spoke to the Count. He would say nothing. Friends of Percy spoke to him. He too refused to speak on the subject. And the Count's lovely sister would only cry.

Maria di Sallando was very lovely. Gossip-writers who had never set foot on Italian soil were never tired of asserting that she was as beautiful as a sunset on the Bay of Naples, or moonlight dappling the Grand Canal. That Percy, who had chased every lovely creature in Town, on or off the stage, should fall in love with the Count's beauteous sister is, perhaps, not surprising. Percy's mode of life had left his heart very susceptible to flashing dark eyes and an oval face such as Maria's

But the Count did not approve of Percy, and showed his disapproval by publicly snubbing him in the Carlton grill. That was when the duel rumour began to circulate. It was still circulating at the end of a week. Londoners spent the following week-end roaming the parks and commons in case they should come upon the unusual sight of duellists with crossed épées, parrying and feinting for a vital thrust.

They were disappointed. They felt that Percy Gunn had for once let them down. Then, on the Tuesday morning following that disappointing week-end, they rubbed their eyes as they opened their newspapers, forgot Continental

strife, and stared at bold headlines announcing that Percy Gunn's body had been found on Wimbledon Common, transfixed with a rapier, on the hilt of which was engraved the arms of the di Sallandos. In Percy's right hand had been loosely gripped another weapon, its bright point slightly stained by dew, but not by blood.

Percy Gunn had pulled his last and greatest prank. So thought the reading public as they read.

Superintendent Anthony Slade of Department X2, New Scotland Yard, assigned to the case, thought otherwise. It was Slade, accompanied by his chief assistant, Sergeant Clinton, who went to the mortuary to view the body and to take over from the local divisional man after the finger-print men and photographers had played their several parts at the scene of what was officially a murder.

"And his eyes were closed when he was found?" queried Slade.

The divisional man nodded.

Slade pulled up one of the eyelids and looked at the pupil. He did the same to the other eye Both pupils were dilated. He opened the man's mouth, for luckily *rigor mortis* had not set in, as the man had been dead barely an hour and a quarter, and sniffed.

A faint sweet odour clung in the cavity of the man's throat.

The man who came upon the body was called in, and questioned.

"Did you touch him?" asked Slade.

"Only to see if he was still alive. He wasn't."

"Did anything strike you as peculiar?"

"Well, it all did, if you understand what I mean. There he was, with a sword sticking clean through him, and another in his hand, almost dropping out of it——"

"Right. That's what I wanted. When you touched him you did disturb the body a little."

"A little, yes, I suppose so."

"Enough for you to notice that the sword in his hand was loosely clasped. Not the way you would expect a man fighting for his life to clasp a sword?"

"Why, no, not now you come to mention it. I didn't think of that."

"All right, that'll be all, thank you."

When the man had gone Slade turned to the police surgeon.

"Doctor," he said, "you say death was instantaneous?"

"I do. The rapier blade went straight through his heart. Either he was a poor swordsman, or else his opponent was a very clever one."

His meaning was unmistakable. The Conte di Sallando was known to be one of the finest swordsmen in Europe.

"Well, doctor, you're probably right. But I'll add this to your information. Gunn never knew when he was—spiked. That's the word to describe it. He was unconscious, drugged with chloroform. Look at his eyes, and there's still a trace of the stuff in his mouth. His closed eyes gave me the clue. Had he died with his eyes open whoever killed him would never have thought of shutting them."

A couple of minutes later the police surgeon admitted the truth of the Yard man's contention.

"A point to you, Superintendent. The death signs are consistent with stabbing. I'm afraid I didn't proceed any farther than that."

Slade returned to the Yard with Clinton, feeling that the case held a factor about which he knew nothing. Di Sallando was a gentleman who prided himself upon his family name and tradition. He would not stoop to an assassin's act. He would not dope his opponent and then run him through the body.

Yet Sallando's rapier had been found piercing the dead man's body. It was a clean wound. No possibility of death having been caused by one weapon, and afterwards another replaced in the wound, to baffle the police.

Sallando's sword had killed Gunn.

Slade completed his report and called Clinton.

"We'll visit Sallando now, Clinton. He can't get out of this. Death in a duel is murder. But there wasn't even a duel. There's a tidy explanation due."

But at the Count's house they were met by a very apologetic manservant who was sorry, but the Count was out of the country, as he understood, with his sister, travelling incognito.

This was a rude set-back.

"How long's he been gone?" queried Slade.

"Four days, sir."

"You have seen the news in this morning's paper?"

"About the duel? But that is impossible. The Count has not been in England. He left with his sister on account of a rumour linking his name with that of Mr. Gunn. The Count, I assure you, sir, is a man of honour. He——"

The manservant gestured airily, as though mere words could never express just what sort of a man his master was. Slade scanned the man's face, and found it a mask that told him nothing. The man spoke with a slightly foreign accent, and his eyes were very alive.

"Who is in charge?"

"I am, sir. Giovanni Rosario, at your service. If I can be of any assistance, I am sure the Count would——"

"An Italian?"

Slade's curt question cut across the other's wordy explanation. The dark eyes glowed, but the lips smiled.

"Of what you would call Italian extraction, sir. My mother was from Milano, my father was a Spaniard."

That certainly accounted for the man's surname; but to Slade the man was altogether too glib.

"Have you any idea when the Count will return?"

Another gesture, and, "No, sir. When a lady has a broken heart——" followed by a final shrug.

"You have charge of the Count's things while he is away?"

"Most certainly."

"Are any of his rapiers missing?"

The man hesitated.

"Well?" asked Slade impatiently.

"I must confess, sir—yes, one."

"When did you first notice that it was missing?"

"This morning, after reading that dreadful account in the newspapers. I assure you, sir, I am willing to help the police in any way, and I have a great respect for your English Scotland Yard, but it is impossible that my master can be concerned in this terrible affair. Impossible. There must be some mistake."

"Perhaps," said Slade laconically. "I'd like to look over the house."

"Of course."

Slade's "look over" was a thorough search by himself and Clinton. At the end of half an hour he was convinced that the Conte di Sallando was not concealed anywhere on the premises; nor, for that matter, was his sister.

The two Yard men were shown out of the front door by the suave manservant.

"I don't like that johnny," said Clinton as they walked down the street.

"Then we agree on one thing in this case, Clinton," said Slade, and the sergeant was surprised to see his chief smile. Slade's step was jaunty. He was on to something. However, the sergeant knew Slade too well to ask outright at this stage what that something was.

Back at the Yard the chief of Department X2 put through a call to the editor of a magazine that devoted itself to narrating the comings and goings of the leaders of Society.

"Did you hear that the Count of Sallando was leaving England with his sister?" Slade asked.

"No, Superintendent!" The editor sounded surprised. "But surely, after what has happened, he hasn't——"

"I shouldn't think so," returned Slade evasively, and rang off. "Clinton," he said, "I want a man sent round to the Count's house to get that Rosario's fingerprints. I don't care how he gets them. He can take a vacuum-cleaner, or he can go to test the drains. I leave it to you."

Irvin, a plain-clothes man of Department X2, returned with Rosario's fingerprints towards evening. He had called at the house ostensibly from the water company, and had got the manservant to hold a spanner—luckily, with both hands.

Photographic plates were taken, but the man's "dabs" were not in the Yard's files.

"Clinton, I want a copy sent by tonight's air mail to Paris. Arrange for that. I'm having a call put through to the Sûreté."

Routine work finished, Slade returned to his office, where Clinton was awaiting him.

"We're going to tab Rosario," Slade announced. "We may learn something."

That night the two Yard men kept watch on the Count's

house. Hour after hour passed, and eleven had struck before Rosario was seen to leave the premises. He walked round to a neighbouring mews, where he was observed to take a large sports car from a garage. As he turned into the main road a Flying Squad car moved after the sports car, in pursuit. The man at the wheel of the Squad car knew his job. Clever as Rosario was, he could not shake off his unknown pursuer, and when he drove into open country he was confident that his exit from the Metropolis had been unobserved. He drove twenty miles into the heart of Hertfordshire, to a lonely house set back from a secondary road. He was gone about an hour before he returned to his car and drove back towards London.

"Let him go. We'll call on the Count," said Slade.

"You think he's there?" said Clinton, surprised.

"I'm certain he is. And just as certain he's not expecting us."

Slade's knock on the door brought no reply.

"We'll break in," he decided.

Entry was made through a rear window. The two Yard men, confident that their retreat was covered by the two plain-clothes men left in the Squad car, advanced through the darkened house. They entered rooms in which dust lay thick on the few pieces of furniture. Nowhere was a light burning.

"Damned if I know what to make of this place," said Clinton, in a whisper, as the two detectives mounted an old, creaking staircase.

"It's a hide-out, Clinton," said Slade. "But not the sort you expect."

Clinton said no more. They had reached a square landing, and from behind a closed door came the unmistakable sound of a woman sobbing. Slade tried the handle of the door. It was locked.

"Do we smash it in?" asked Clinton.

"No, that would spoil everything," said Slade, producing a bunch of keys, one of which unlocked the door, and the two detectives entered to behold a strange sight in the rays of their electric torches.

Chained and padlocked to a tall chair was a man Clinton easily recognized as the Count of Sallando. Standing at his side was a girl with frightened eyes.

It did not take long to get their story after Slade had freed the Count. Rosario was responsible. He had spread the story of the duel, doped the Count and his sister, and brought them as prisoners to this lonely house in the country.

"What were his demands?" asked Slade.

"Money. He threatened to make me give him money. Now I know what he meant. He killed Mr. Gunn and arranged the crime so that I should be involved. I haven't an alibi, and he wants most of my fortune to get me out of the country. He says he can arrange that, but I am afraid, Superintendent, for Maria. I would have surrendered, I must confess, but she would not allow me. She too is a Sallando."

He said it proudly, his head erect.

"How did you come to take him in your employ?" asked the Yard man.

"He came with excellent references from a French nobleman, the Vicomte de Brunnec. I know now they must have been forged." The Count's voice wavered and broke, but with an effort he pulled himself together. "He has treated us like cattle, chained me to that chair, left us no light, locked the door, and called once a day with a little food. Whenever he comes he laughs and is merry, and he said tonight that if I had not made up my mind to give him the money by tomorrow when he calls he will forget to come the next day. That would mean starvation for Maria. I'm afraid her health——"

The Count's voice broke again. There were tears in his eyes. Slade could see that the man was very weak from the continued confinement and lack of exercise and sufficient food.

He said, "You would wish justice to be done, I know, Count." He explained how Percival Gunn had died. The Count's face set in lines of pain. "There is only one way that can be secured," Slade added.

"Tell me, Superintendent. I am willing to do anything—anything to repay this villain for the suffering he has caused my sister."

"Do you think you could go through another day, both of you?" asked Slade. "I will arrange for you to have

some food, and all I want is for you to be in this room, and the door locked, when Rosario calls tomorrow. We must catch him here, with you as prisoners. That would be conclusive. Otherwise, if we free you now, and let you return to town, there is a risk that he may elude us. He is a man of considerable resource. But, naturally, I must leave the decision to you."

The Count looked at his sister. She nodded her head.

"Very well," said Slade. "Make yourselves as comfortable as you can in this house, but at the usual time he calls tomorrow be in this room—with the stage set. You understand? Good. I will leave a man with you."

Clinton was the man Slade left to look after the Count and his sister. The next morning a report came through from the Sûreté, confirming that the fingerprints of the man known as Giovanni Rosario were in their files as being those of a man long wanted by the French police for a bank hold-up in Dijon, in which a cashier was brutally shot down. The cashier had died after lingering for some weeks. The wanted man was a certain Francois Voisin, and the the Banque du Sud was offering a reward of five hundred thousand francs for his capture.

The day passed with plain-clothes men from Department X2 keeping watch on the Count's town house. Hourly 'phoned reports came through to Slade. In the late afternoon he received a report from Clinton, as arranged. Everything was in order. After some exercise in the garden, Clinton reported, the Count and his sister were both feeling much better, and their appetites had improved.

"No need to send for a doctor," said Clinton. "They're doing fine, and the Count's like a kid on a spree at thought of getting Rosario redhanded."

The day closed, and a Flying Squad car, with Slade and three armed plain-clothes men, drove to a warehouse-yard not far from the mews where the Count's sports car was garaged. As on the previous night, shortly after eleven the wanted man walked round to the garage and got out the powerful sports car. A plain-clothes man ran to a telephone kiosk, put through a hurried call to the Yard, and from

the Yard a warning message was sent to the waiting Clinton.

Then the chase was on.

Again the quarry was not successful in shaking off his pursuers, and when he drew up at the gates of the lonely country-house the Squad car was barely four hundred yards away.

Slade and his men got out and hurried forward. A light tap on the front door, and it was opened by the waiting Clinton.

"He's upstairs. Listen," said the sergeant.

Slade and his men heard a peal of wild laughter echo through the old house.

"Come on," said Slade.

They reached the landing, bunched themselves, and rushed. The door was not locked, and the man they had come for was taken completely by surprise. The whole manoeuvre was executed like an attack by trained troops. The cornered man produced an automatic, but Maria di Sallando saved at least one policeman's life by suddenly jumping forward and clinging to his arm. The next minute Rosario was handcuffed, and Slade was saying, "Francois Voisin, *alias* Giovanni Rosario, I arrest you for the murder of Percival Gunn, and anything you say..."

But the remainder of the Yard man's caution was drowned in a cry of savage rage.

When Voisin was taken down to the police car the Count turned to the Yard man.

"Superintendent, I don't know how I can thank you enough. For my sister and myself——"

"We should thank you, Count, for giving us this opportunity of taking him in the act, and if your sister had not clung to his arm there might have been a further tragedy."

The Count placed a protective arm round his sister's shoulder.

"You are very modest, Superintendent. But are you sure

you can bring home the crime to him? Sergeant Clinton has told me there were no fingerprints on the rapiers."

Slade smiled.

"True, but we found a bottle of chloroform in his car—or, rather, your car, Count. I don't think there's any chance of his escaping."

"I thank God for that!" murmured the Count fervidly. "But may I ask one question, Superintendent? I shan't bother you after that, I promise."

"What is it?" Slade inquired.

"How did you first come to suspect him? He acted his part cleverly and well, I understand. Yet you were not deceived."

"No, I think I can say that, Count. I asked him how many of your rapiers were missing. Or, rather, I asked him if any were. The same thing, in effect. He said one. You see?"

The Count nodded.

"And he was not surprised?"

"No, that was what struck me."

Clinton interrupted.

"Sorry, but I don't get it. How could that make you suspicious?" he asked Slade.

"If there had been a duel," said Slade, "two evenly matched rapiers would have been used. Am I right, Count?"

"Assuredly, Superintendent."

"You see, Clinton. Only one of the Count's rapiers was taken. Gunn was made to appear to have used another kind of weapon, but not one evenly matched. That pointed to murder of course, but when the Count's own manservant, who should have realized the importance of this, apparently accepted it as natural, I was surprised, and then suspicious. Voisin made the grave mistake of not placing in Gunn's hand another of the Count's rapiers. Had such a duel been fought a pair of equally weighted and balanced weapons would have been used. The Count would never have fought a duel after arriving with only one of his own rapiers, and

expecting his opponent to turn up with another single weapon. If the Count will forgive me, that would have been too crude, and that crudity should have been apparent to the Count's servant—so apparent, in fact, that he must have remarked upon it when he protested that the Count could not have committed the crime. It was a definite oversight, Clinton, and I think it has a moral."

"What's that?" asked the sergeant.

"Stick to boxing-gloves. They're safer for all concerned."

THE BATLEY INHERITANCE

MICHAEL BATLEY received a considerable amount of sympathy when his brother Mark was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for adding his signature to a piece of paper on which, legally, it had no right to appear. Michael had no wish to prosecute. Everyone knew he was fond of his younger brother, and looked upon him more as a ward than a member of the family who had small claim upon him. Mark had kicked over the traces from before he was sent to college; which, as everyone knew, was the reason why their father had cut him off with a paltry three hundred a year and left the fortune to the staid and very worth-while Michael.

But the bank had other views than Michael. The cheque had been honoured, which made it their responsibility. Mark Batley was brought to trial for forgery, and Michael had the onerous duty of testifying against his brother. At the trial the marked difference between the brothers was manifest. Mark gave his address as his brother's home, the old family house near Dorking, in Surrey. Evidence was offered to show that Michael had willingly allowed his

brother to make his home with him after the funeral of their father.

Mark pleaded guilty, and there was nothing in his bearing to indicate that he regretted his action. In vain his counsel pleaded with him to change his attitude. Mark was indifferent. He stated openly that prison could not be such an unwelcome change to a man who, with a mere pittance, had to stand by and see his brother squandering thirty thousand a year.

All of which was very far from the truth, as the prosecution revealed.

Mark went to prison. He might have escaped, legal minds thought, if he had behaved himself and allowed his brother to stand as security for his future good conduct. But Mark didn't seem to care.

He went to gaol in December, shortly before Christmas, and was due to be released in the August of the following year. By the February the case was forgotten, but in March interest in the Batleys and the Batley inheritance welled anew.

On the 14th of March Michael Batley was found shot dead in his home, Mount View, overlooking the beautiful Surrey hills. He was unmarried and died intestate, and Mark Batley, working in the machine-shop of one of His Majesty's prisons, smiled as he thought of the fortune that was now his.

Michael's death was a mystery, and when Scotland Yard, in the person of Superintendent Anthony Slade of Department X2, C.I.D., was sent to undertake the necessary investigation no clue that might aid in its solution was readily forthcoming.

After a morning spent in searching the house and grounds Slade repaired to the room where Michael Batley's body had been found by a maid, and dropped into a chair.

"Clinton," he said to his assistant, "this time we've been allotted a gum-tree. Well, we're up it, and the prospect isn't too good."

"Looks like a cat-burglar's handiwork to me. He got panicky and let Batley have it."

"That would seem the answer, Clinton, if we didn't know

that last night it rained fairly steadily, and that underneath the window of this room there are three flower-beds, set with spring plants. However tall that cat-burglar was, make him nine feet if you like—which is more than a reasonable limit, man—he would still have had to tread on one of those flower-beds. The fact remains that he didn't. Now, don't tell me, after shooting a man dead, your burglar took a telescopic rake from his pocket and on a dark night—no moon, remember—smoothed over the disturbed soil."

Clinton stood at the window, looking down. Slade's argument was logical, as was its conclusion. The murderer could not have entered by the window.

"Yet," persisted Clinton, not willing to relinquish the one tenable theory he could envision, "the door was found shut, the spring of the latch down. That means it could only be opened by releasing the catch with a key. The maid had to use her key."

Slade nodded.

"Therefore we are left with a murderer who materializes out of nothing, Clinton, and, presumably, vanishes in the same baffling manner. And not only our spiritual murderer, but a very solid gun that fires a thirty-two calibre bullet. While contemplating the spiritual side of the case, we must not lose sight of the materialistic."

He sounded bitter. He had reason to; no one had heard the shot fired, the door was secured when the maid entered the room, the window was shut, and the moist ground some twenty-five feet below undisturbed, and, last but by no means least in the chain of puzzling details, the gun was not to be found.

They had searched every corner of the room, without finding anything. Michael Batley's body had been found sprawling across the floor just in front of the hearth, dead from a bullet in the brain. Medical evidence proved that death had occurred some time about two or half-past in the morning.

"And while we sit here puzzling our brains," Clinton moaned, "brother Mark in prison is rubbing his hands to think someone's left him a legacy of thirty thousand a year. Well, he's lucky to be out of this mess. He's about the only person in the world, I should say, with anything that could be called a motive."

Slade shot his sergeant a swift glance.

"That's right, Clinton. I hadn't considered motive. Thirty thousand a year and this place would be an excellent motive."

"If one hadn't such a perfect alibi. In fact, I can't think of a more perfect one," grunted Clinton. "A man in stir has got all the witnesses he wants to convince anybody where he was at any minute in the day or night."

Slade glanced at the fireplace, and shook his head. Both he and Clinton had smeared their clothes with soot exploring the wide mouth of the chimney. They had found nothing, no hidden gun or secret steps leading to another room.

"And yet, Clinton, one thing connects this case with Mark Batley."

"What's that?"

"This was his room when he lived here." Slade looked round. "His pictures probably, and furniture——"

His reflective mood was interrupted by a tap on the door. Clinton opened it, to find a timid-looking housemaid fumbling with her hands. There was a large black smudge on one of her cheeks.

"Please, sir," she said, addressing both Yard men at once, "I thought I ought to tell you I've been doing the grate in the poor master's library."

Clinton pulled a sour face at this piece of volunteered information, but Slade was quicker to perceive what the girl meant.

"You've found something you want to show me?" he said.

"That's right, sir." Her attention was now given to Slade alone. "Some bits of burned paper among the ashes. I've read in mystery stories that they're sometimes clues. These have just got odd bits of writing on them, a word or two, that's all."

The girl hastened back to the library, to show her exhibits, a few charred scraps of paper. Slade sent the girl away, and examined the scraps through a powerful lens.

"They're no use, Clinton, unless we can identify the handwriting. There's enough saved for that. But the few clear words tell us nothing. I'm afraid as 'clues' they would be more valuable to a mystery-story writer, or a——"

He paused, looked up suddenly.

Clinton waited. Slade had had an idea, and it would

grow into a verbal explanation in his own good time. Clinton knew that. After some moments the chief of Department X2 said, "We must get a specimen of Mark's handwriting, Clinton."

The sergeant started.

So that was the way Slade's thoughts were turning. He frowned. It seemed a waste of time, but he refrained from saying so.

"That'll be easy enough."

"And I also want to know, Clinton, how frequently Mark wrote to his brother. If whoever censored his letters took copies we may be in luck, but I'm not expecting much from that direction."

The upshot was that Slade learned from the prison authorities that Mark Batley had written to his brother at least once a week. He had been in prison just over three months; that meant he had sent about a dozen letters. He had also received about the same number. Copies of his letters had not been made, for he was not an habitual criminal, and the precaution had been considered unnecessary. However, inquiries were made of the officer who had vetted prisoner Mark Batley's correspondence, and he seemed to recall some trace of urgency on Mark's part for his brother to recover some papers, family papers he understood them to be. Mark had been very guarded in his letters. The papers had been mentioned only casually, but always there had followed a request for his brother to find them. So far as the officer remembered, Michael Batley had not been successful in his search.

This information gave Slade food for contemplation. He returned to Mount View, and went through piles of Michael Batley's papers. On the second day of his search he was rewarded. In a blue morocco book at the bottom of a drawer in the desk in the library he found a page of notes in Michael's small, neat, but easily recognizable handwriting. The notes were headed "Mark's Papers," and underlined, and in the main they consisted of numbered paragraphs, with such notations as, "Not behind the Cézanne," "No sign of them in the books in the bookcase," "Have looked through the trunks, but no sign." There were eleven such numbered paragraphs, and they covered practically the entire contents of the room that had been Mark Batley's while he resided at Mount View.

Slade puzzled over these paragraphs until his head ached, but could make nothing of them. He even tried searching

the objects himself, the Cézanne painting and other pictures, the books, and articles of furniture, but he was as unsuccessful as Michael had apparently been.

"Or had Michael been successful?" Slade asked himself

Had he searched in the right place at last, but died before he could secure the papers? The prison record showed that Mark had sent his brother twelve letters. Only eleven paragraphs were listed on the page of notes, one for each letter save the last.

Was that significant?

Another point the prison authorities had proved. The charred scraps were the remains of Mark's last letter to his brother. That letter had been posted in the prison mail-box the morning of the day before Michael had been shot.

Where, Slade asked himself, was the connection? Or was he chasing a mirage in a desert of doubt?

Doggedly he told himself there must have been a motive for the crime, and that he was following the only line where motive lay. None of Michael's papers had revealed that any person other than his brother had had a motive for killing him.

Yet Mark had been hundreds of miles away in gaol at the time Michael's brain had been pierced by a thirty-two calibre bullet.

To pursue that line of investigation seemed on the face of it a sheer, fantastic waste of time. But that dogged streak in Slade's character kept him at it. Painstakingly, he returned to Mark's one-time room, and carefully noted down the objects in the room as they were listed in that page of notes. When this was finished he asked himself what was left in the room to be examined that might hold hidden papers?

He stood where Michael's body was found and asked the question silently four times before a glimmering of an idea appeared in the clouded darkness of his feverishly working brain.

He got down on the carpet, rolled his body into the position in which Michael had fallen, and marked an eye-line along the floor. He traced that eye-line upwards, slowly, noting where it passed.

Then quickly he got to his feet and began a fresh search. He did not find any hidden papers, but he found how Michael Batley had died.

And when he knew he stood in the centre of the room, very still, for some moments.

"My God!" he whispered to himself. "What fiendish ingenuity!"

He knew he was contemplating the work of one of the cleverest rogues he had ever pitted himself against. He knew, furthermore, that there was only one way to bring that rogue to justice. He would have to use beguiling arguments, because he knew the Assistant-Commissioner would frown at his unusual request, but Slade now felt himself engaged in a personal battle, a battle of one man's will and cleverness against another man's.

That evening he saw the Assistant-Commissioner, and overcame official prejudice. A notice was sent to the Home Secretary, and the next day Mark Batley, accompanied by a warder, found himself taken on a strange train journey. The warder's lips were apparently sealed, and Mark could get no information from him. But when the train drew into Waterloo Station and both warder and prisoner were escorted to a police-car which set off south through London Mark Batley realized whither he was bound.

"You're taking me to Mount View!" he suddenly exclaimed as he caught sight of familiar landmarks along the road to Dorking.

"I am," said Anthony Slade, who hitherto had remained silent.

"But why? Am I expected to attend the funeral of poor old Mike?"

"Perhaps."

That was all Mark Batley could get out of Slade.

Yet it was noticeable that the nearer the car approached the man's one-time home the more nervous he became, until as the police-car drew into the wide gravelled drive of the old house he could hardly remain in his seat.

"You'd better keep a grip on yourself, Batley," advised Slade. "You'll want all your nerve for what you're going to face."

Something in the detective's tone quickened suspicion in the other's mind, but with a touch of his old self he recovered the control he was near to losing.

"Mike wasn't a beauty when he was alive. Don't think I'll be scared to look at his face now it's adorned with a bullet-hole."

He said it with a flamboyant touch of bravado that made

the Yard man ache to deliver a solid shoe-tip in the seat of his trousers.

But Mark Batley was not led into the room where his brother's body lay in a coffin. Slade and the warder marched him straight up the stairs. At the foot of the stairs he caught sight of the coffin through an open door.

"Hey," he said, "this isn't the way to the morgue!"

"I think it is," said Slade decidedly.

Again that spark of suspicion flamed, but the prisoner quelled it. He must keep his nerve, he told himself. But he nearly lost it completely when he was ushered into the room that was so familiar to him. Two men sat on the settee by the window. One he recognized as the prison governor. It was perhaps not to be wondered at that he did not recognize the other man; he had never met him. He was the Assistant-Commissioner in charge of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard.

"Well on time, Slade," said the A.C. approvingly. "Everything ready?"

"Yes, sir."

Slade motioned to Clinton to close the door. The sergeant did so, and stood with his back to it. The warder was told to stand well back, against the farther wall. Trying in vain to look as though this was an everyday occurrence with him, the man obeyed.

Slade and Mark Batley stood in the centre of the room, and the Yard man flashed an inquiring glance at the A.C., who nodded.

"Right, Slade, carry on."

The Yard man took Batley's arm.

"I want you to stand there, Batley," he said.

Slowly the prisoner shuffled into position. There was visible look of strain on his face.

"Yes, just like that." Slade bent down and fixed the man's feet as he wanted them. "Now stretch out your right hand—no, your right—that's it, and rub it gently over that carved panelling of the mantelpiece."

Every one in the room saw that Batley's outstretched hand was trembling. His fingers barely touched the woodwork.

"Now press a little harder, Batley," said Slade. "No, harder."

Batley stiffened.

"What is this?" he protested angrily, and would have withdrawn his hand had not Slade clutched it.

"You'll find out," said the detective gently, "very soon now. Press harder . . . harder . . . harder . . ."

Perspiration beaded the goaded man's face, ran down his cheeks and soaked into his collar. The atmosphere of the room was tense. Suddenly he seemed to lose control.

"Very well!" he shouted. "I'll show you!"

He pressed hard upon a portion of the panelling, and there was a short click, the panel swung outward, and in the cavity was revealed a poised and levelled gun, the muzzle directed straight at Batley's head. As the panel reached the limit of its swing the trigger on the gun jerked, but the only result was another click.

Then the panel swung shut.

Mark Batley stood before the fireplace, breathing hard, his face streaming with moisture now, and very pale. He barely felt the hand Slade placed on his shoulder and the words the detective spoke as he charged him with the murder of his brother Michael Batley.

Dazed, unable to realize that he had been duped, Batley was led away, and the door closed after him.

The A.C. stood up.

"Deuced convincing, Slade, I'll grant you that, man, but how the devil you doped it out is more than I can conjure."

"Most extraordinary case," murmured the prison governor. "Dramatic too, very dramatic."

He seemed in two minds about approving or objecting.

"I had only one motive," Slade explained. "I didn't build my case to fit the motive. I hunted for the case that would be explained by the motive."

"Yes, I appreciate that, Slade," nodded the A.C., "but how came you to realize Mark Batley was a possible suspect even?"

"I considered this case in the light of Mark Batley's trial for forgery, and that trial, with the remarkable witness-box display given by the prisoner, seemed explained. As I saw it, Mark Batley bungled the forgery job so as to get sent to prison—*after he had prepared this trap.*" There was a gasp from the prison governor, and a twinkle appeared in the pale eyes of the A.C. "From prison he sent his brother letters asking him to hunt for some important papers, and in each letter he hinted at a possible

hiding-place. That was clever. A less-clever man would have rushed things. He had patience, too much for his own good. He meant to get his brother's fortune, the Batley inheritance, and he saw one perfect way. This way was it. His brother destroyed his letters. Probably he asked him to some time when he was visited by Michael. But he kept up this game of hunt the papers, which he doubtless hinted were incriminating, and his brother, anxious to aid him to make a fresh start when he came out, took the whole bait and was hooked. When Mark directed him to the mantelpiece by some evasive wording Michael was as good as dead."

"But no one in the house heard the shot," the A.C. pointed out.

"Because the gun was fitted with a Maxim silencer. I took that off as soon as I discovered the contraption. It has valuable fingerprints. Then I dismantled the gun, and took out the bullets, replaced it, and fixed the trigger spring again. That's the case, sir. The fingerprints on the gun, and what you have just seen, should hang Mark Batley."

"Well, he's got six months of his old sentence to serve before he comes up for trial," said the prison governor grimly. "That'll give him time to think things out with himself, and I can promise you one thing," he added, glancing with meaning at the A.C. "Batley will stand his trial. He'll get no chance to slip his leash while he's in my charge."